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[PERILS OF THE ROAD.]

ROB ROY MACGREGOR; OR, THE HIGHLAND CHIEFTAIN. A ROMANCE OF SCOTLAND.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Amy Robsart," "The Bondage of Brandon,"
"Breaking the Charm," "Ethel Arbutnot,"
or, "Who's Her Husband?" &c., &c.

CHAPTER I.

FATHER AND SON.

"And yet he thinks
I am the slave and servant of his will.
Well, let it be; through all the maze of trouble
His plots and base oppression must create
I'll shape myself a way to higher things,
And who will say 'tis wrong?"

BASIL: a Tragedy.

ABOUT the middle of the seventeenth century the influence of the House of Hanover began to make itself felt upon England. Trade revived, and there was peace at home and abroad, the only source of trouble to the realm arising from the plots of the Jacobites and the adherents of King James, which was the title the Pretender arrogated to himself. These plots were chiefly fomented in the north of England and Scotland, where the Jacobites firmly believed that they should succeed in driving George from the

country and place the exiled prince upon the throne. So strong was this feeling among the adherents of the House of Stuart that a Jacobite would never drink the king's health without passing his glass over a glass of water, to indicate that he did not drink to George, but to the king over the water, as James was a guest at the Court of France. The sentiment was intensified from the fact that nearly all the Jacobites were Roman Catholics, and the supporters of George mostly of the Protestant denomination.

A staunch supporter of the reigning dynasty was Mr. Osbaldistone, a London merchant in Crane Alley, within the city limits, who did an extensive trade with Bordeaux, in France. He came of a Jacobite family in Northumberland, but had early in life separated himself from them to come to the metropolis, where he rapidly acquired wealth and position. His brother resided at Osbaldistone Hall, in the north, having a large family of sons, but he had no intercourse with them, and at the time our story opens he had not seen or heard from them for several years.

Mr. Osbaldistone had married, but had the misfortune to lose his wife, who left him a pledge of her affections in the person of a son, whom he had christened Frank. It was the object of his ambition that their child should be brought up to the business and worthily support the credit of the great and deservedly famous house of Osbaldistone and Co.

Consequently Frank Osbaldistone received a mercantile education, and at the age of nineteen was sent to a correspondent in Bordeaux, named Dubourg, where he was expected to obtain a knowledge of the conti-

mental trade, which was already assuming large proportions with England.

For two years Frank remained abroad, but the accounts transmitted home by M. Dubourg respecting him did not please Mr. Osbaldistone, who was informed by his correspondent that his son liked better to write love sonnets than balance a ledger, and preferred to read French classics than shipping goods. This was not the character which Mr. Osbaldistone desired his son to develop when he grew old and Frank succeeded to the business in Crane Alley. It would certainly degenerate if he did not display more sterling commercial qualities, and much incensed, he determined to recall him to London and make him put on the official harness under his own supervision. In those days a merchant resided in the house in which he carried on his business, and, as a rule, his clerks and apprentices found a home under his roof. Mr. Osbaldistone lived in Crane Alley, having his counting-house on the ground floor.

Frank duly received his letter of recall, and took passage in the first sailing vessel which quitted Bordeaux for the port of London. On his arrival he walked from the dock to the house of his father, and was received kindly, but not effusively, by his parent, who was a man of strong will, and not inclined at any time to give way to sentimental weakness. It was near the dinner hour, and the head clerk, Mr. Owen, received the honour of an invitation to join the party. Owen had been connected with the firm of Osbaldistone & Co. all his life, and had grown grey in their service. The prosperity of the house was his pride and his boast. He was never tired of talking about its wealth, its high credit, and its extensive branches in all parts

of the world where British trade and enterprise had penetrated.

He had known and loved Mr. Francis, as he called him, since a child, and he fondly hoped to see him some day the leading spirit in the business, which under his fostering care he expected would double itself in importance and riches. After dinner, Mr. Osbaldistone opened some fine claret, which had been shipped under Frank's own superintendence from Bordeaux, and began a conversation which had been maturing in his mind for some time past. As he looked at his son, he was compelled to admit that he was quiet and gentlemanly in his manner, being perhaps a trifle too reserved, that not being exactly a fault, however, in a young man. His dress was neat and in the fashion; his figure erect, and his features strikingly handsome.

"It is time that we should come to an understanding, Frank, respecting your future," exclaimed the merchant, "and with that end in view I have sent for you from France. Owen, draw your chair up closer."

The head clerk had hitherto preserved a respectful distance, but in obedience to this command he came nearer to the head of the house, for whom he had as much deference as a courtier for the reigning monarch.

"I am perfectly willing, sir, to hear your views on the subject," replied Frank. "And indeed I may add that I have for some time been desirous of discussing the matter with you."

"Very good," continued the merchant. "You have a fine career before you, and by a strict attention to business you may, like myself, become one of the first merchants in the city of London."

"Ah!" said Owen, in a tone of admiration. "No young man ever had a finer chance, for the house of Osbaldistone and Company is second to none."

"Thank you, Owen," replied the merchant. "I am well aware that we stand well on 'Change. It will be for my son to keep up the reputation I have established, and of which I may say that I am justly proud; but it is a painful fact, so Dubourg informs me, that Francis evinces more taste for the fine arts and belles lettres than for mercantile pursuits. This must be cured."

"My dear father," Frank rejoined, "I am sincerely rejoiced that you have broached this subject, for it is one that I should have had great delicacy in approaching."

"I am at a loss to understand you," said his father, frowning.

"Let me make my meaning clear, sir. I have been examining my own mind for some time past, and I have reluctantly come to the conclusion that nature has not been kind in one respect."

"To what do you allude?"

There were indications about Mr. Osbaldistone's face that the gathering storm was about to burst upon the devoted head of his son.

"I am not fitted to be a merchant, for trade of any kind is repugnant to me."

"Ho! ho!" cried the merchant. "So you want to play the fine gentleman with the money which I have worked hard all my life to accumulate."

"Not so, sir. Your money is your own, and I should only ask you for sufficient to support existence upon until I can find some congenial pursuit in which I could get a living."

"And what in the name of wonder can you do?" asked his father. "I hear you have taken to writing verses. Do you suppose that a beggarly trade of that kind will support you?"

"I thought perhaps you would allow me to travel for a year or two, and that I could then go to one of the universities, either Oxford or Cambridge," said Frank, mildly.

"Never!" replied Mr. Osbaldistone, emphatically. "I offer you a post in my counting-house, and a share in the business when you are fitted for it."

"And I, sir, respectfully refuse your offer."

Francis Osbaldistone spoke with a determination equal to his father's, and his declaration of

independence, not to say disobedience, so completely astonished Owen that the old man nearly fell off his chair.

"Master Francis!" he cried, in a tone of ex-postulation, "you do not know what you are saying. It is just stark, staring madness, and there is no other name for it. Bedlam is the only place for a young man who refuses an offer like the one made to you."

"Peace, Owen!" exclaimed the merchant. "It is for me to talk to this young ape of fashion. Harkee, sir; if you do not consent to my wishes concerning you in three days, I shall send you to my brother, your uncle in the North, where he can make a fox-hunter of you, and where you can write your sonnets to the moon, and I will take one of his sons, my nephews, and put him in your place."

"As it seems fit to you, father," replied Frank, respectfully.

"Mark me, repentance will come too late. I will not have you back again. You choose your lot, and as the saying is, 'So make your bed, so lie on it.'"

Frank bowed his head, as if to intimate that he was well aware of the fact, and prepared to accept the issue as it was put to him. He knew that his father would be deeply mortified, but he had taken a strong dislike to commerce, and could not be persuaded to do violence to his feelings.

"I now know what that mad player fellow they call Shakespeare meant," said Mr. Osbaldistone, "when he wrote 'how it was sharper than a serpent's tooth to have a thankless child.'"

"Indeed, father," answered Frank, "I am not thankless. Believe me, I am deeply grateful to you for all you have done for me and profess myself willing to do, but I cannot be a merchant."

"Cannot! Will not, you mean. It is the duty of a son to sacrifice his own wishes for that of his parents. Use is second nature. After being in the counting-house a few years, you would like it; but I have said my say. Owen, you can stay and finish the bottle; I am going on 'Change.'"

Taking up his hat, the irate merchant left the clerk and his wayward son together, quitting the room abruptly and shutting the door with a bang that made the house shake. Owen groaned deeply.

"Oh, Mr. Francis!" he said, "what have you done? I didn't think you had so hard a heart. Why Fortune smiles on you, and you'll have none of her. This is the very height of folly. You surely must be moonstruck."

"Not at all, my dear Owen," rejoined Frank, "my head is perfectly clear. I simply object to be made use of. My father looks upon me as a bale of goods invoiced to him from the Continent, and landed free of charge at his warehouse. I have a soul above trade."

"Bless the boy!" cried Owen. "what can be finer than trade? It makes the wealth of the country, and we should be nowhere without it."

"I do not like it, that is all."

"What will you do down in the North among a set of pestilent Jacobites, who when not eating or drinking or hunting the fox are plotting against their lawful sovereign King George, whom may Heaven preserve. Ah, me, this is a sad day for the house of Osbaldistone and Company. I thought it would have been Osbaldistone and Son, but the lad's crazy. What will he do in the North?" added the old man, as if speaking to himself.

"Indite sonnets to the moon, as my father sagely suggested," replied Frank, with a smile.

"You'll find that a poor business, I'm thinking," returned Owen. "And if ye abide by it, you'll soon have your fine coat out at the elbows. Think better of it, Master Frank; the head of the house has given you three days to turn it over in your mind."

"It is useless," said Frank, firmly. "Come what may I will not be a merchant."

"Good lord!" groaned Owen again, "I can see how it will be. One of your cousins will come up and get the business; you will be dis-

inherited, and there is nothing better before you than to die a country schoolmaster. Oh! that I should live to see this day."

"I can't help it if it is to be so, though I hope there is something better than that in prospect for me. I must leave you to finish the bottle, Owen, for I am not a deep drinker. A couple of glasses of your French or Rhemish satisfies me. Console yourself, my old friend, trade is not everything. I will stroll up to Paul's Churchyard and see what gay gallants be abroad."

Nodding kindly to Owen he left him completely overwhelmed with the misfortune which he fancied had fallen upon the great house of Osbaldistone and Company.

CHAPTER II.

ON THE ROAD.

Away! our journey lies through dell and dingle,
Where the blithe fawn trips by its timid mother,
Where the broad oak with interesting boughs
Chequers the sunbeam in the greenward valley.
Up and away!

The three days' grace which Mr. Osbaldistone allowed his son to decide in the weighty matter of whether he would become a clerk in the house quickly passed, but they brought no alteration in Frank's decision. He had turned the matter over carefully in his mind, and he came to the conclusion that he would best consult his inclination, if not his interest, which was a thing that he cared very little about, by going to his uncle at Osbaldistone, Northumberland.

It mattered very little to him whether one of his cousins came up from the North and took his place at the desk, so he curtly informed his father that he was prepared to make the journey whenever he chose to send him. Mr. Osbaldistone told him that he had expected this reply, and had sent an express to the North to ask his brother to send one of his nephews to London to make his fortune in business, and to accept Frank as a boarder in his place.

"I have procured you a horse," continued Mr. Osbaldistone, "and in this bag you will find fifty pounds. It is all I shall give you, and many young men have begun life with less. I could have wished to have treated you decently—that is to say in a different manner, but you will have it so."

"Give me your blessing, father," said Frank, into whose eyes the tears came.

"Nay, lad," replied Mr. Osbaldistone, turning away hastily, as if wishing to avoid any exhibition of weakness. "You have that wherever you go. Farewell. Remember your king and your religion, and become neither a Jacobite or a papist."

"You may rely, sir, upon my being true to those religious and political principles which you have inculcated," said Frank.

"Pooh! pooh!" answered the merchant. "I have no right to rely on anything. I gave you a commercial education and you were not true to that; but it is too late for discussion now. Your horse awaits you, and Owen has packed your saddle-bag."

Frank wrung his father's hand and quitted the room, feeling sad at the parting, yet, at the same time, experiencing a strange sense of elation at being free to follow his own inclination, and at having escaped what, to him, was the hateful thralldom of the counting-house desk. Travelling in the good old times was not particularly easy or agreeable. Our grandfathers had the comfort, such as it was, of stage coaches and post chaises, while we have railroads, but Frank Osbaldistone had to be content with a powerful roan horse, on which he could do his thirty to forty miles a day on indifferent roads.

Wishing Owen good-bye, he started on his journey, and passed through the home counties to the midlands, and so on towards the north without any adventure worthy of note. The roads were said to be infested with highwaymen, and it was notorious that many gentlemen of desperate fortunes had taken to the trade of highway robbery. Frank carried a pistol, with

which he intended to defend his money and his life if he was attacked, though he had no occasion to display his courage.

As his journey progressed, he skirted the western side of Yorkshire and came into Durham, nearing the town of Darlington. While on the road he was overtaken one fine morning by a fussy little man, whose appearance did not give him any pretension to the title of gentleman. He bestrode a powerful black mare, and had before him, strapped on to the saddle, a small portmanteau, of which he took the greatest care. To judge from his looks, this personage, whose meeting with our hero had an important result, seemed to be a pettifogging attorney, or some kind of Government clerk, selected for his business from the shrewdness he displayed.

"Sir," exclaimed the little man as he rode up to Frank Osbaldistone, "pardon me for accosting you, but I presume that you are journeying to Darlington, whither I also am bound, when I take the great northern road."

"Darlington is my next sleeping place," replied Frank, "though I am at a loss to see how that can possibly interest you."

"Well, no. It may not be apparent at the first sight. The fact is, I am a very nervous man, though I can be as brave as a lion on occasion. If anyone attacks me I will fight to the death, sir, to the death."

He tried to look very big, at which Frank smiled.

"I trust you will not be called on to show your bravery," he remarked.

"It will be bad for any rascal of the road who interferes with me. I will draw my pistols and put myself on guard. Saha!"

He pointed an imaginary weapon as he spoke, and Frank put him down as a coward if not an impostor.

"My name is Morris, sir," he went on. "I am a farmer, only a poor farmer, travelling to the north to see some relations, and seeing you ahead I thought I would honour myself with your company, if you have no objection?"

"That is well put, Mr. Morris," answered Frank. "I have no liking for travelling with strangers."

"Nor I, sir, nor I," heartily rejoined the little man, "and that emboldens me to inquire your name."

"It is at your service, Francis Osbaldistone." The little man seemed surprised.

"What?" he cried. "Are you related to the family at Osbaldistone Hall. The veriest Jacobites and foes of the Government, Jesuits and traitors."

Frank looked severely at him.

"Hark ye, Master Morris," he replied, "if you wish to keep your seat on your horse you will have to moderate your language and keep a civil tongue in your head at the same time. You sought my company, not I yours. I know nothing of my family at the Hall, as I am from London, and less recently from France."

"Worse and worse," said Morris.

"What do you mean?"

"The Pretender is living in France. That is where all the plots are concocted. I wish you a very good morning, Mr. Osbaldistone, and faith, I am sorry I stopped to ask you for your company."

He touched up his mare with the whip and cantered up the road as if he would escape from Frank, but the latter put spurs to his horse and soon overtook him.

"Nay, sir," he exclaimed angrily, "since you begged my company, you shall perforce have it as far as Darlington, whether you like it or no."

"I pray you, spare me the infliction, sir. It is not well for me to be seen in the company of disaffected people," replied the traveller.

"You are insolent," retorted Frank. "I am a liege subject of King George, and hate the Pretender as much as you can do."

"Well, well, we will even travel together since you will have it so," answered Morris. "They do say there are Scotch footpads and freebooters in the north, and though I have the courage of the lion, as I told you, when put to it, two are better than one. Think no more of what I said."

"As you will," rejoined Frank, who was more disgusted than angry at the words of the stranger, which, however, served to show him the estimation in which his uncle and his family were held in that part of the country.

After this conversation they continued to travel together. Mr. Morris held the reins of his horse with one hand, keeping the other continually on his portmanteau, which from the solicitude with which he regarded it, seemed to contain something valuable.

Frank Osbaldistone ventured to question him as to its contents. The owner assumed a nervous air, and declared that it held only a few clothes which he had brought from Derby, and that the highwaymen if they attacked him were welcome to it if they wanted it. The apparently careless, but really studied denial as to its containing anything of value, made Frank believe that he carried gold or silver with him, and that this accounted for his nervousness and extreme caution.

When they were within ten miles of Darlington they passed through a desolate and deserted piece of country; not a house was to be seen. They traversed a lonely heath, the only object worthy of attention being a gibbet, on which a man had been hung in chains for some terrible crime committed on the highway. His skeleton swayed in the wind, the bones rattling dismally, while a huge raven, black as the night, sat on the top of the gallows and screeched in a melancholy manner at the approaching travellers.

Such a sight as this was not of rare occurrence in those days, for dreadful examples of social and political offenders were constantly being made. Even then, the blanched and fleshless heads of traitors, executed during the rebellion, were to be seen on spikes over the gates of the ancient city of Carlisle.

"Heaven protect us," said Morris, looking at the gibbet. "That's an awful sight."

"You should rejoice in it," cried Frank, "for that mode of execution is adopted to strike terror into the hearts of the highwaymen, who are the gentry you seem to dread most."

"Ay, ay, that is true enough; yet methinks you talk too much of that class of gentry. Ha! what is that?"

The noise of a horse's hoofs clattering on the hard road aroused him, and turning his head he beheld a solitary horseman coming at full speed towards them.

"Great powers!" he continued; "we are pursued. Let us fly! You fellow is a highwayman—I am sure of it. Mr. Osbaldistone, you will adhere to and protect me? You belong to a noble and honourable family, sir, and will not see me robbed."

His tone in what he considered his hour of peril was very different to the one he had employed when he first met his youthful companion.

"As to my honourable connection," replied Frank, "you appear to have changed your mind greatly in a short space of time, and as to being robbed, that is a matter of uncertainty. You stranger may not be what you imagine, and I think you informed me that your portmanteau contained nothing but clothes."

"I—I did not speak the truth," answered Morris. "The fact is, I am in the pay of the Government, and I have specie with me."

"Your secret is safe with me," said Frank; "I am a loyal subject, sir, in spite of your injurious suspicions and unjust remarks. If the person behind us is a highwayman I will protect you to the best of my ability."

This assurance somewhat calmed the apprehensions of Mr. Morris, who had urged his horse to a gallop, but who now slackened his speed.

"You must not think," he observed, "I am what is called a coward. I value my life little; it is my charge that I am anxious about. If I had nothing in custody I would laugh at a dozen footpads who bade me stand and deliver. Oh, lord!" he added; "here he comes."

His momentary bluster faded away at the appearance of the strange horseman, who, acting with the usual courtesy of the road, drew

rein, and, doffing his hat, wished them "Good day," speaking with an unmistakable Scotch accent. It was the first time Frank had ever seen a Scotchman, for at that time there were fewer in the metropolis and fewer still in France, therefore he regarded the stranger with considerable interest, and, it must be admitted, with not very much liking.

It must be remembered that he was a supporter of the Hanoverian dynasty, and he looked upon the Scotch, especially the Highlanders, as mischievous zealots, who wished to foment revolution and place a Pretender on the throne. The man before him was a magnificent specimen of humanity, considerably above the medium height, and well-proportioned, while his frame was as strong and muscular as that of an athlete. His face was handsome and highly intelligent, though he had sufficient power of expression to veil his thoughts when he chose. His form was slightly angular, and his cheek bones were prominent. His clothes were somewhat shabby, and betokened the dress of a small farmer.

"Give you good-day, gentlemen," he exclaimed. "You will be frae the south?"

"Yes," replied Frank, "I am from London. And you, sir?"

"Aweel, I'm a pair Scotch body, buying cattle in these parts. You may ken that from my looks, for I hae more the savour of the stable than the drawing-room about me."

Mr. Morris somewhat recovered his composure at this speech, and held up his head again, but instantly drooped it again as the stranger resumed:

"You hae a tight grip on that valise of yours, sir. I haven't much doubt that you carry valuables there."

"No, sir, no," hastily replied Morris; "only a trifle of old clothes. Nothing of any value, I assure you."

"I'll gie you a pund o' Scotch sterling, and take the chance," laughed the stranger.

"You'd be welcome to it for less, but I love old clothes, and can't afford to buy new," replied Morris. "I'm glad, however, we met you, for this is a lonely place, and we can travel in company."

"If my presence is nae disagreeable I'm with you," said the stranger. "I'm a Scot, as I hinted, of the Clan Campbell. Honest Rob Campbell they ca' me, though I never robbed anyone yet, except in the way of trade, and ye ken fu' weel that a man is justified in robbing another in business."

"Oh, yes, if he gets the chance to do it," answered Morris.

"I hae mickle doot," continued Campbell, "that it would tak' a mon who got up airily in the mornin' to get to windward of you, I think, sir."

"Certainly, that is so; I am not easily taken in, though I do not mind admitting that I thought you were a highwayman when I heard you behind us, and my good friend here, Mr. Osbaldistone, shared the opinion."

The personage who had called himself Rob Campbell bent a keen glance at Frank from under his shaggy eyebrows and started with ill suppressed astonishment at the mention of his name. "An Osbaldistone," he cried, "and frae Lunnnon town! I did na ken there were ony of that breed in the southern parts."

"I am about to visit my relatives at Osbaldistone Hall," replied Frank. "They have never seen me, nor I them."

"They'll scarcely suit a dandy of your water, though you sit a horse as well as if you were born in the saddle," answered Campbell.

"You seem to be acquainted with the people of this district," remarked Frank.

"Nae mickle. I trade here and I trade there. I may know some of the quality, but it's nae great thing to make a sang aboot," Campbell said, in his careless way.

They jogged along together, talking amicably, Morris seemed to be personally impressed with the Scotchman, to whom he confided that he was himself journeying to Scotland and would be glad of his company, as he disliked travelling alone.

"I am sure," he observed, "that you could give a good account of highwaymen. I can see courage depicted in your countenance, not that I am afraid, but there is safety in numbers."

"Yestere'en," replied Campbell, "I shot two cowardly louns who waylaid me."

"Two?" repeated Morris, whose admiration rose at this declaration. "Why you are a very Sampson. Be my companion. I will pay all charges. I have that with me which causes me to be careful," he added, lowering his voice.

"It grieves me to decline your offer," answered Campbell. "But I prefer my own society to that of strangers, and mak it a rule to journey alone. As to the payment of charges, I hae enouch to discharge my lawing at my inn and buy a mutchkin of whuskey, anent I need it."

This rebuff silenced Mr. Morris, who clutched his portmanteau closer and allowed his mare to ramble a little ahead.

"Your friend, sir," said Campbell, "is too free in his discourse. It is lucky he has met with honourable gentlemen."

"Nay," replied Frank Osbaldistone, "he is no friend of mine. I met him on the road a few hours ago in the same casual way that you encountered him, and, truth to say, I know as much of him as I have any inclination to inquire."

"Upon my faith, you are sensible in your conclusions, for he is not a man with whom a gentleman like yourself could form any lasting intimacy. Do you stay long at Darlington, sir?"

"Only for the night. I shall push on at day-break to my relatives, as I am anxious to conclude my journey."

"We will drink a stoup together at the 'Black Bear,' which is, to my thinking, the best hostelry in the town, and I will quaff my portion to our next meeting."

"Which may never occur," said Frank.

"Hoot awa', mon," cried Campbell, "the world is wide, and yet it is ae sma'. Those who meet once often meet again, and an Osbaldistone will always find a fren' in Rob Campbell. Fare ye weel. Your nag's gang too slowly for me. I will hie me to the 'Black Bear' and tak on me the liberty to order dinner for a' of us."

Raising his Scotch bonnet, he spoke to his horse, which instantly set off at a rapid pace, leaving Frank and Morris to follow at their leisure.

(To be Continued.)

A ROMAN VENDETTA.

IN Rome, last year, there was a model-girl named Guglia Setacci, who was a wonder of beauty among all the painters and sculptors. Two noted sculptors, who were brothers, Ernesto and Gabriel Bagnagetti, fell desperately in love with the siren, who was as coquettish as she was beautiful, and the result was a fierce quarrel, in which Ernesto was killed; after which the beautiful cause of the fratricide fled with a young brigand, while the murderer escaped the law only to fall a victim to the most maddening remorse. The image of the dead brother returned to him in the guise of love, as he had been before the beautiful Guglia had estranged them, and his love for the woman turned to bitter hate.

He conceived what the Italians believe in as a sort of superstition and duty, a vendetta, that is, a sworn vengeance. He disguised himself, and upon the report of a visit to Paris, frequented the haunts of the thieves and brigands of Rome, where Guglia habitually went. He was not long in finding her, but it took six months to persuade her into his residence and win her confidence; which he did, however, at last, and under so perfect disguise that she never suspected who he was. In carrying out his vendetta he had become poor, and was obliged to work at wood-carving to make a livelihood. He carved figures of saints, and the work was so beautiful that the saints never waited long for purchasers.

One day Guglia disappeared suddenly, and three days afterward her mangled corpse was

found in the Tiber; but who the murderer was nobody could even suspect. The wood-carver disappeared ten days afterward, and in his room the landlord found the blood-stained garments of the beautiful model-girl, and a keen sculptor's tool, with evidences on it of the crime; so that it was plain that Guglia's last friend—the wood-carver—had done it. But where to find him was the question which no detective could answer.

In the meantime the sculptor, who had been supposed to be visiting Paris, appeared in Rome again. A few weeks ago, long after the crime had ceased to interest anybody, an artist happened to be in the police headquarters, and noticed a figure in wood of St Sebastian, and was so much struck by its beauty that he inquired why and how it came in such a place.

"Why," said an officer, "the saint was made by the wood-carver who murdered the pretty model-girl. He left it when he ran off."

"Then," exclaimed the artist, "I can tell you who the murderer is; for I'll swear that figure is the work of Gabriel Bagnagetti. No other sculptor in Rome could have done it."

Gabriel's remorse had been wiped out by the accomplishment of his vendetta; but no sooner did the officers confront him with the figure of St. Sebastian, and the opinion of the artist, than he burst into a frantic fit of rage and confessed the crime. His artistic skill had betrayed him through all his precautions, and by means of his patron saint.

COME WITH ME, DARLING.

Oh, come with me, darling, do come away

Down by yon bright meadows and scent the mown hay;

We shall there seat us down on the brink of yon stream,

And talk of the days of our youth's happy dream.

We shall take the old by-path, a-down the old lane,

And drink in the scenes of our childhood again;

I shall pull fragrant branches and nicely entwine

A wreath for your brow, love, and you one for mine.

We shall romp, we shall skip, as we oft did of yore,

We shall climb up the cedar and tall sycamore

We shall pluck the tall lilies and wild jessamine,

With bunches of ferns from the same old ravine.

We shall gather them all in a heap near the brook

And o'er the bright past take a long, dreamy look;

We shall then fondly hope that the dream of the past

In Eternity's future for ever shall last.

G. T. Q.

THE RELIABLE MAN.

Of all the qualities that combine to form a good character, there is not one more important than reliability. Most emphatically is this true of the character of a good business man. The word itself embraces both truth and honesty, and the reliable man must necessarily be truthful and honest. We see so much all around us that exhibits the absence of this crowning quality, that we are tempted in bilious moods, to deny its very existence.

But there are, nevertheless, reliable men, men to be depended upon, to be trusted, in whom you may repose confidence, whose word is as good as their bond, and whose promise is

performance. If any one of you know such a man, make him your friend. You can only do so, however, by assimilating his character.

The reliable man is a man of good judgment. He does not jump to conclusions. He is not a frivolous man, he is thoughtful, he turns over a subject in his mind, and looks at it all around. He is not a partial or one-sided man. He sees through a thing. He is apt to be a very reticent man: he does not have to talk a great deal. He is a moderate man, not only in habits of body but also of mind. He is not a passionate man, if so by nature, he has overcome it by grace. He is a sincere man, not a schemer or a plotter. He does not promise rashly; what he says may be relied on. He is a trustworthy man.

You feel safe with your property or the administration of affairs in his hands. He is a watchful, vigilant man. You feel secure in his protection. He is a brave man, for his conclusions are logically deduced from the sure basis of truth, and he does not fear to maintain them. He is a good man, for no man can be thoroughly honest and truthful without being good. Is such a quality attainable? Most assuredly so. It is not born, it is made. Character may be formed. Of course then its component parts may be modelled to that formation.

THE Oxford and Cambridge Boat Race has been fixed to take place next year on March 20th.

A RIVAL marksman of Dr. Carver has appeared in California. His name is Dr. John Ruth, and one of his common performances is to shoot apples and cigars from the mouth of an assistant, who stands a considerable distance away.

THERE is a young and comely widow in Scotland who cannot again enter the bonds of matrimony without the consent of his Grace the Duke of Richmond. This lady's former husband, having spent a considerable sum in improving his farm, and having no son to inherit his lease, applied for permission to assign his lease to his wife in case of his death. The permission was granted on condition that the widow should not marry again without the consent of the Duke. The husband died, and the widow is now in possession.

An arrangement concluded between England and France provides that any distressed mariner of either country landing in a colony of the other country or in the territories of a third Power shall be supplied with board, lodging, clothing, and travelling expenses until he finds fresh employment or is able to leave. The arrangement comes into operation on the 1st of January, and is terminable at twelve months' notice.

THE author of the regulations for Press correspondents with an army in the field was no other than General Sir Garnet Wolseley himself.

SIR WILFRID LAWSON has been speaking in Scotland on his favourite topic, and has strongly urged his listeners to abstain from drink. We fear, however, the worthy baronet's advice will not be greatly followed, for the Scotch, as a body, without being to any degree intemperate, follow the reason given by a Highlander for taking a "drappie," viz, that it tended to kill the animalcules in the water.

HER MAJESTY has been graciously pleased to forward to Captain Chard a very handsome ring as a mark of her appreciation of his heroic conduct at Rorkes Drift. The gift is accompanied with an autograph letter. The ring is a valuable diamond water-kloof.

DOG LICENSES.—Dogs are likely to have a bad time of it between now and next Budget-day. The department which is responsible for the collection of the dog-duty have had such a waking up from the Treasury that an extraordinary amount of energy is being displayed by the officers of Excise in bringing those guilty of evasions before the authorities. There are now some hundreds of prosecutions in the initiatory stage in the metropolis; and the Treasury warning is likely also to soon make itself felt in the provinces.



[INTERESTED ATTENTIONS.]

TWICE REJECTED; OR, THE NAMELESS ONE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"The Baronet's Son," "Who Did It?" &c., &c.

CHAPTER VII.

It was alone! alone! alone!
Oh, misery, that word's thine own,
Joy never uttered it, but sorrow
Speaks it to-day, and shall to-morrow

THE same evening Geoffrey was sipping claret and discussing a cigar with his client, Lord Dunallan, and then the lovely image of Leila was unpleasantly conjured up once more.

"Who on earth was that girl, Sabine?" asked the viscount, carelessly puffing his smoke well nigh in the young lawyer's face.

It brought a cough as the only answer for the first moment or so.

"She is a client."

"What for—breach of promise?" asked the viscount. "Why she can't be eighteen, I should say."

"I have no acquaintance with her baptismal register, and it is not de re to explain one client's business to another," answered Sabine, coldly.

"What a musty piece of parchment you are, Sabine. Why can't you leave the office behind you?"

"That's just what I want to do, and you dislike," returned Geoffrey.

"Well—what's her name?"

"I scarcely know—Lorraine, I believe," said the young lawyer, drinking up his claret as he spoke.

"She is a perfect Venus. Never saw a lovelier girl. Has she got no parents that she goes

about alone to the haunts of the law," said the Viscount, suspiciously.

"I really know nothing about her, except that she is a companion to one of our clients, a lady of rank, who is a great invalid, and that is all I can tell you, and more than it can be any consequence to you to know, Lord Dunallan," said Geoffrey, coldly.

"A 'companion' to a musty old woman. What an infamous shame, when she could be such an angel in a fellow's house," laughed the Viscount. "Come, Sabine, open that red tape mouth of yours and tell me the name of the duenna."

"The knot is too firmly tied, thank you. I decline to loosen it," returned Sabine, firmly.

"You mean you would like it to be tied, eh, you sly dog," laughed the Viscount. "But it's no go, my good fellow. You must marry an heiress, not a portionless angel."

Thanks for the warning. I have no wish for either," said Sabine. "Your lordship is too obliging to superintend my morals and prospects. Perhaps you would think it an impertinence for me to return the warning. Miss Lorraine is no wife for Lord Dunallan, and a man ought to be shot who would think of anything else with such an unprotected innocent girl."

"You are belligerent. No—learned in the law," laughed the Viscount.

"I am resolute."

"That is, you would be ready to commit murder for her sake?"

"To punish a scoundrel, most assuredly, I should be ready and determined," said Geoffrey, flushing. "Lord Dunallan, we had better understand each other. You saw Miss Lorraine by accident at our chambers, where she came on important business, and if you take the slightest advantage of the meeting or my words to annoy or insult her, I shall forget that you are anything but a scoundrel."

Lord Dunallan laughed scornfully.

"My good fellow, don't excite yourself, as if there were not a hundred pretty girls besides

this lady-love of yours that you are ready to quarrel with a friend and make a fool of yourself for her sake. It's a jolly thing, nevertheless, to be a managing clerk when it secures a private interview with such an envoy," he went on with a provoking sneer. "No wonder you want to keep the bon fortune all to yourself. I surrender at discretion," he added, carelessly. "Suppose we adjourn to the opera for an hour."

And the young men were soon whirling in Lord Dunallan's cabriolet to Covent Garden. It was a great night. A Patti night. The house was crowded, and the new comers could only find standing room in the pit, which had the advantage of giving them a general view of the glittering throng.

There were diamonds and duchesses, beauty and belles' toilettes in bewildering profusion, but the opera glass of the Viscount Dunallan was directed to one of the amphitheatre stalls, where a young girl in a simple white dress, and Italian cameos set in jet, was sitting by the side of a lady wrapped closely in cashmere shawls and a sort of mantilla enveloping her head.

He did not point out the object of his attention to Geoffrey Sabine. In fact, he rather moved the glass in a different and opposite direction when he saw his companion's eyes turned that way. But Adelina's singing and the splendid crowd around him were equally disregarded in his fixed watch over the movements and actions of those humble and simply dressed individuals.

Suddenly, in the midst of the last scene of "La Traviata," there was a slight confusion and rustle that disturbed the stillness of the wrapt audience. Then it ceased, to the hearing of the lower part of the audience. A moment after, and Lord Dunallan had disappeared without a word to his companion. A few seconds more and he was in the cloak-room, assisting to carry a fainting lady to the open air.

"Miss Lorraine, allow me to assist you. Is

your carriage near?" he said to the girl in white, who had attracted his gaze so long.

Leila started at the sound of her own name, and turning hastily, recognised the individual she had seen at Mr. Vansandam's office.

"Oh, thank you so much. Madame de Cenci is an invalid. She was so anxious to come to-night, and it has been too much for her," returned the girl, eagerly, only too thankful to find help in such an emergency. "I am not sure whether the carriage will be here yet. Perhaps she could lie down till it comes," she added, doubtingly.

"I will see for one myself if yours is not up yet, and you will allow me to attend you home, I trust. The lady seems too faint not to need some stronger arm than yours," he added, smiling.

He flew off as he spoke, leaving the comtesse on a corner of the large sofa seats, where a lady was offering restoratives to the invalid, and in an incredibly short time re-appeared.

"I have found the carriage of a friend of mine, who will not need it for another hour. Allow me to support you, madame," he added, giving his arm to the comtesse, while Leila supported her on the other side.

It was the extreme heat of the house that had affected the comtesse, and she gradually rallied as the air blew on her pale cheeks, but still the viscount adhered to his resolution to escort the invalid home.

"The attack may return," he said, deprecatingly; "and you, mademoiselle, do not look equal to the emergency should it arise," he added, with a half smiling, half anxious glance at Leila's delicate cheek and anxious face.

Madame de Cenci made no objection, and Leila could not but confess some alarm at the idea of some sudden and perhaps fatal attack happening to the comtesse during their rather tedious transit to Eaton Square. The viscount placed himself in a corner of the carriage opposite to Miss Lorraine, and even in that imperfect light the beautiful features of his vis-à-vis were scanned by him with ever increasing admiration.

"She is charming," he murmured to himself—"charming, and she shall be mine," was the whisper that followed in his heart.

But not one vestige of this was visible to either the girl or the sick comtesse. The young man preserved a respectful silence during the drive, only broken by occasional suggestions as to the invalid's comfort. And when they reached the house which the comtesse had hired for the season, he assisted her into the house with the attentive care of a son rather than a stranger.

"You will allow me to remain till Madame de Cenci has rallied," he said. "I believe, from some coincidences which have occurred to me as we drove home, that she must be a friend of my mother's in former days—during a long residence in Italy—when I was a child. It may be a confused fancy of mine, but still I should like to test its truth. May I stay, Miss Lorraine?"

What could the girl say? It was not for her to assume the supervision of the comtesse's house, nor to reject the advances of a possible friend. So she bowed a silent assent, and hastened away to the invalid's chamber. Left to himself, Lord Dunallan used the solitude well in surveying all around.

There were views, albums, sketches, letters, that were all inspected in turn. Even some Italian books with the words on the fly-leaf were attentively examined while left alone in that elegant morning room, while now and then notes were entered in his card-case of the more salient points in the scattered and varied contents of the apartment. He had scarcely completed the self-imposed task when the sound of light footsteps was heard, and the next moment Leila entered.

"The comtesse is much better now; she is quietly in bed," she said, softly. "I am so glad, and so thankful to you for your assistance, Lord Dunallan."

He raised his shoulders deprecatingly.

"How could any man do less? And the

more so since I am all but certain the comtesse was a friend of my dear mother's," he said. "But it was very annoying that Madame de Cenci's illness came on so inopportune to prevent your hearing the rest of the opera. Was it your first visit?"

"Oh, no," she replied, hastily, too much taken by surprise to understand the full consequences of the admission.

"Indeed! What, this season?" he said, quickly.

Leila was truth itself. She could not shelter her imprudence under a falsehood, and she said, quietly:

"No. I went with some friends when I was in London last year. But you must excuse my leaving you. I cannot stay away from the comtesse," she added, quickly.

"Nay, one moment, Miss Lorraine. I had the pleasure of meeting you this morning at my lawyer's, Mr. Vansandam's. It cannot be pleasant for you to go to such a place alone, or on business that must be so unintelligible and irksome. Can I be of any use to sparing you the duty. I understand Italian perfectly from my long residence there as a boy, an accomplishment that I fancy is not shared by my friend Sabine. Do make use of me as a substitute."

"Pardon me, my lord. It is my duty to obey Madame de Cenci's wishes. I am her companion, her attendant; I cannot dictate to her," she answered, haughtily.

"You an attendant? You look more like a countess than a companion, Miss Lorraine," exclaimed Lord Dunallan, in a tone of affected horror, it might be satisfaction. "It is, indeed, too strange a freak of nature to be believed. There must be some extraordinary mistake," he went on, with an incredulous shrug, "some change in the cradle, I cannot but think. However, I will not detain you," he said, seeing the girl's impatient gesture. "I shall call on the comtesse in the morning, and I hope she will admit me for a few minutes. Au revoir."

And he took his leave with the mingling of deference and freedom in his manner that was especially offensive to Leila's refined feelings.

CHAPTER VIII.

More dangerous far, as each one knows,
When thou art in thy sober clothes,
And praying or preaching thro' the nose.

LADY AGATHA PENNYTON and Mademoiselle Tremaine were names shouted with all due voice and distinctness at the Duchess of Danesford's ball on the night of the performance which Madame de Cenci had been so suddenly obliged to quit. The announcement was followed by the entrance of guests, who evidently excited no little sensation in the crowded ball-room, for a slight buzz and a movement towards the door which they passed through, betrayed the interest excited by the arrival.

Lady Agatha was nobly born, handsome, and wealthy enough to have received such homage, even if she had only possessed one of the attributes combined in her person. The only child of a wealthy marquis, with a splendid form and delicately cut features, and a proud, princess bearing, she was the queen of the season, and eagerly contended for as a partner by a crowd of admirers, albeit it needed some assurance to aspire to her hand. But as yet rumour had only whispered that one was more favoured than the rest, and that report was reluctantly listened to by the less fortunate captives to her charms. On this occasion, however, she appeared at once more than usually beautiful, and more than usually agitated and preoccupied. Perhaps the unwonted emotion gave her that touch of softness which was the chief lack in her all but perfect loveliness.

True, she danced more than once, and forced herself to talk with some appearance of animation, but it was evident that some mental or physical suffering oppressed her, and at last she pleaded fatigue as an excuse for sitting out a dance for which she had a name on her card, and her companion was fain to turn to a more animated and willing listener to his small talk

on his other side. But ere the waltz was quite over a figure glided through the crowd and approached Lady Agatha almost unnoticed by others. A glance of mingled pleasure and defiance gleamed from her splendid eyes.

"Lord Dunallan, this is an unexpected advent," she said, haughtily.

"Hush, Agatha! Do not speak so formally," he returned, in a low tone, placing himself with skilful generalship between her and those next to her on the sofa. "Surely I have not forfeited my privilege to hear 'Egbert' pronounced by your lips instead of my other title?"

"You were tardy in claiming your privilege, at any rate," she said, coldly. "I was absurd enough to break through etiquette, and promise you the first waltz after I came into the room. But, as I perceived at the opera, you were too engrossed to remember such a trifle," she went on, bitterly.

A covert smile parted the viscount's lips.

"Dear Agatha, I am almost too flattered to be disturbed by your anger, especially as I feel innocent of offence. The lady who faints at the opera was a foreign friend of my mother's—a stranger here, and it would have been really unfeeling to let her go home alone. But in truth I hastened here impatient to obtain my reward at your hands—and behold my reception," he said, reproachfully.

"She was not alone, however," said Lady Agatha, significantly.

"No; she has a companion, I fancy—some half-maid, half-attendant on her," he replied, carelessly. "But, Agatha, spare these needless reproaches, and tell me rather that you appreciate my self-denying devotion to duty."

"To filial memories, is that it," she said, half archly. "The present should be more vivid than the past, the living than the dead. I scarcely accept the compliment or the excuse as you wish, Lord Dunallan."

"But, Agatha, will you not—do you not remember your own cruel sentence," he said. "You have condemned me to wait for what seems an endless penance before I speak to Lord St. Columb, and yet you expect me to hold myself bound, while yet I dare not display with pride my cherished chains."

There was an earnest plaint in his tone that warned her not to carry her imperious coquetry too far.

"You are sadly used, Egbert. Shall I give you back your freedom?" she asked. "I am not very much alarmed lest I should be left planté by your defection."

"How can you banish me so cruelly for such a trifling offence," he said, eagerly. "If I had dreamed I should miss one cherished minute of happiness with you, Agatha, I fear I should have been a very unwilling escort to poor Madame de Cenci. Come, you will not be inexorable, you will give me one waltz, however brief, will you not?" he pleaded, with eyes as well as lips.

She was half framing an assent with her proud lips that could yet wreath in such soft sweetness on occasion when a voice pronounced her name with a kind of conventional assurance in its tone that carried a provoking weight with it.

"Lady Agatha, I believe our dance is called. May I lead you to the place?" said Lord Mayfield.

It was Leila's old lover who came to interrupt the colloquy.

"Lady Agatha has an unfulfilled engagement with me, which will prevent her dancing with you this waltz, Mayfield!" said the viscount, haughtily.

"And I disclaim all right of yours to interfere, Lord Dunallan!" returned the marquis, sharply. "It is no fault of mine or Lady Agatha's that you were not here in time to take your proper place. Lady Agatha, I think you will not break your promise to me for Lord Dunallan's neglect?" he went on, turning to her with a reproachful, deprecating air.

She hesitated. Her pride was certainly piqued by her suitor's delay. Now had she forgotten the lovely face of Madame de Cenci's

companion as they passed from their places opposite to her box.

"Certainly not, Lord Mayfield," she said, rising. "It is a clear case of 'He that will not when he may,' and Lord Dunallan must confess it is a just punishment, that is if it is one at all," she said, with a half-apologetic smile, as she left the spot.

A cynical smile crossed the viscount's features.

"Lost on me, proud Agatha; the jealous pique is too evident. It was that bewitching girl who did the mischief, and, on my soul, I don't believe Agatha would hold her own if she was in the same—Well, of course, it is madness—only a passing amusement; but yet I do feel more struck than I ever was by peress or peasant before," he thought, dreamily, as he watched the moving throng.

An idea suddenly struck him. He would leave the ball, and if Lady Agatha was amenable to such treatment, it would be a wholesome lesson. If not, he could easily plead indisposition as a make-peace between them.

"She shall not triumph over me at her will," he muttered, as he jumped into his cabriolet. "I know she loves me, and I will use the knowledge to master her proud nature. She will not give me up for a trifle, and as to Mayfield, he had better look to himself. I know enough of his history to baffle his game."

And Lord Dunallan drove to his apartments in a more satisfied frame of mind than might have been expected from the occurrence of the evening.

"And you really are the son of Lady Dunallan who used to be so popular in Florence some years ago. I remember the name—yes, quite well," said the Countess de Cenci, as the handsome and suave young nobleman sat in the morning-room, to which he had been admitted by especial grace and favour.

"Most certainly she remembered you, madame, and used to speak of her esteem for you with great pleasure," rejoined Egbert, with a gracious smile. "Probably you knew so many English ladies in your residence there that you have not so vivid a remembrance as she had of the acquaintance."

"Probably; and my health is so shattered, and I am so engrossed with the affairs which have brought me over, that my memory is confused," she said, apologetically. "It is very flattering that you, as a young man, should condescend to recall such antediluvian reminiscences," she went on; "and you speak Italian so well. It is as perfect music to my ears amidst this harsh-tongued language of your country."

"I shall be delighted to place my lucky accomplishment at your service, madame," he said, "whenever you may need an interpreter of your wishes. No doubt Miss Lorraine is as well up in the language as I am, but then as a lady, and a young lady, she cannot be quite capable in some affairs as one of the sterner sex."

"Exactly. But she is certainly most dear and zealous in carrying out my instructions," said the comtesse, thoughtfully. "Indeed, I feel very fortunate to have met with such a companion in my enforced solitude."

"She has been highly recommended to you, no doubt, dear comtesse," suggested the viscount, carelessly.

Madame de Cenci shrugged her shoulders deprecatingly.

"To say truth, no," she replied. "It was by accident that I heard of her through a friend. She had just become an orphan, was well educated, and in great want of employment. I wanted such a person; her Italian was good; her features and manners pleasing. What more could I want? It was impossible she could do any harm, unless she ran off with my jewels, which are my maid's charge," she went on with a smile. "And seriously, I find her extremely well-bred and attentive and sweet. Only a little sad, poor girl, I suppose from her recent loss."

"No doubt—no doubt," he said, rising, as he saw no hope of Leila's appearance. "I shall weary you, madame, if I stay longer. May I venture to repeat my visit?"

"I shall be charmed, my lord, and sometimes I am strongest in the evening," she said. "If you are inclined to pass a few minutes here on your way to other engagements, you will be a welcome guest in my humble salon."

The viscount could scarcely conceal his exultation at the invitation. "Shall I ring for Miss Lorraine before I leave you? You should not be alone," he added, anxiously.

"You are too considerate, viscount. Leila is gone for an hour's walk in Kensington Gardens. She has a bad headache, and I thought the air would revive her. She was up very late with me, poor child," returned the comtesse.

And Lord Dunallan hastily left the room after this information. Had the comtesse been less preoccupied she would have connected the abrupt departure with the words that preceded it.

The cabriolet was ordered to the Park, and dismissed, while its owner entered the beautiful gardens, whose stately trees are the boast of the English capital amidst its dark and gloomy wilderness of houses and streets.

Leila had gladly availed herself of the permission of her patroness for a brief absence. Her head ached, but her heart was yet more painful in its dull, sick hopelessness. The previous day had revealed to her new risks in her present life. She felt for the first time how unprotected she was; how liable to insult in a position so different from that in which she had been nurtured. Now that the first excitement—the first sensation of relief from pressing need was over, the girl had leisure to comprehend her utter desolation and loneliness.

Rejected by him whom she had been accustomed to consider as her father, abandoned by the betrothed lover who was so nearly her pledged husband, nameless, and without the faintest clue to her parentage, Leila's fate was about as wretched as could be imagined, unless want and homelessness were added to the misery.

"And that will come in time, perhaps," she murmured. "That will perhaps come in time. Oh, mother, mother, how could you condemn your child to such a risk, how sell me to a stranger, to be cast on the wide world alone and unknown?"

She was, as she believed, alone. No living being was near the secluded seat she had chosen, but the tones of her voice, however subdued, sounded like a faint music to the ears of one who listened—music that recalled sweet, sad memories of the past. The unseen eavesdropper advanced a step or two, and his foot was noiseless on the soft rich turf.

Then, as his eyes fell on the young slender form that sat with her head gracefully inclined in the deep sad reverie that occupied her mind, his resolution gave way, and he gave a quick, sharp step that brought him to the girl's side.

"Leila," he said, in a suppressed voice, that yet went straight to her heart's core—"Leila, what brings you here—and alone?"

She started—her eyes gave a half glad, half terrified glance at the speaker. It was Lord Mayfield—he beloved, the betrothed, and the untrue.

Yes, "untrue," for her instincts told her that deep, real love would have covered all—have banished all—save the generous devotion to one innocent and injured and desolate.

She hastily sprang to her feet.

"Leave me, Lord Mayfield," she said, firmly.

"You have no right to distress me by recalling the buried past. I am alone—which should be my protection from insult."

"Insult, Leila? Is it come to that between us? Can you call it 'insult' for me to address you—to be anxious to ascertain your safety and your welfare?" he asked, reproachfully.

"Yes, yes, I do," she replied, vehemently. "I do. All is over for ever between us. I am in a completely different station from you. There is a gulf separating us. It is most cruel to disturb my peace. I am content now."

"Is it so, really, Leila? Have you forgotten so soon?" he remonstrated.

"I have remembered all that is necessary," she replied, with a slight haughtiness in her tone that gave her a new attraction in her wilhom lover's eyes. "And that is—what I was and what I am. I may have plebeian blood instead of being an earl's daughter, but I am as proud and prouder than I was then, and I insist on being left in peace."

He literally could not leave her. She looked so lovely, so refined, so high-bred in her resentment that all, and more than all his old love was renewed in his breast.

"Nay, Leila, do not condemn me so bitterly. At least, let me have the poor consolation of knowing your present fate, whether you are safe—and—oh, heavens," he suddenly burst out, it half maddens me to think, as you say, what was and what is. If the miserable revelation had not been made we might have been happy; if the unfortunate countess had had less time to think, and—"

"Hush, Lord Mayfield," interrupted Leila, who had hitherto listened spellbound as it were by his words—for the old love and the feminine weakness was still powerful within her, "not one word more. I would not have been even an involuntary impostor on my—I mean, on the earl nor yourself—if I could recall the past I would not. Better truth and obscurity and sorrow than falsehood and splendour and undeserved happiness. We must part now, and for ever," she went on, in a sharp, hoarse tone that showed how much the exertion cost her, and rising again from the seat where she had sunk, she hastily commenced to move towards the gate of the gardens.

Still Lord Mayfield continued at her side. He could not bring himself to lose sight of her. He was determined to ascertain, at least, her real position and residence, so that he might have some clue by which he might watch and befriend her if necessary, even if—

Ah, that "if." He could scarcely have himself comprehended the secret reservation in his thoughts.

Leila hurried on without appearing to notice his neighbourhood, but just as they were approaching the more frequented parts of the gardens they were suddenly confronted by an individual, who was, perhaps, as unwelcome to one as to the other of the silent pair. It was Lord Dunallan, who at once accosted Leila.

"Ah, Miss Lorraine, I have come most opportunely, I see. You should not be alone. Allow me to escort you to the carriage," he said, taking her hand ere she was aware, and was attempting to draw it through his arm with only a half scornful nod to the marquis.

Leila was bewildered and embarrassed for the moment. She was true and resolute in her resolve to crush for ever Lord Mayfield's insulting and half-hearted attempts to retain her regard, yet an instinctive repugnance made her shrink from Lord Dunallan's polished yet dangerous attentions. She took a true woman's course. She left the rivals to settle their respective claims and differences, trusting perhaps in her personal safety from the existence of their number.

"You are very kind, Lord Dunallan, but I know Madame de Cenci's carriage is at the gate. I am perfectly able and determined to find my way there alone. It is my pleasure," she added, haughtily.

The rivals were bewildered—astonished. "Her pleasure." The humble companion, the nameless foundling, was as haughty in her bearing and expressions as if she had been a princess, and they, the nobly born and the desirable, parts of a London season, were condemned to an ignoble submission, or a hopeless resistance to the dismissal. Lord Dunallan was strong in his position, and he could afford to be magnanimous.

"At least, I will see you within eyeshot of the carriage, Miss Lorraine. A brief experience must have told you that some protection is needful for you. I only ask just to recall the servant from the carriage, and leave you in safety."

Leila could scarcely refuse the respectful request. She felt that the viscount had penetrated the truth, and she also knew that the truth was discreditable. Her resolution was quickly taken.

"Thank you, Lord Dunallan; that is all I need. If you will call the servant of the comtesse he will protect me from everyone," she said, bitterly.

The viscount winced under the shaft. What did "everyone" mean? Was he included in the category? It was best to ignore the sarcasm and accept the flattering compliment.

"Thanks for the trust. Trust yourself for a few steps further, and I, at least, will not intrude any longer," he said, quietly.

They moved on swiftly, Leila absolutely outstripping her companion. The marquise was there till the very last. He saw the servant beckoned by the young viscount. No word was spoken. The men hastened to escort the fair young creature who had won the hearts of all men, though she was a dependent, into the shelter of the carriage. Lord Dunallan raised his hat, and the horses went off at a brisk trot. Then the marquise accosted him.

"This is the second time we have come in collision, Lord Dunallan. It will be as well not to attempt it the third and final one. Do you understand?" he said, sternly.

"Scarcely," was the careless reply; "you cannot deny that I left the field open for you last night, retiring magnanimously from the contest, though it might be a matter of opinion who was in the wrong. To-day I find you annoying the protégée of a friend of mine, and I naturally interfere on her behalf."

"Be so good as to speak plain English, Lord Dunallan. I am tolerably certain you do not know this young lady. I do, and as to her protector, I, as an old friend, demand the name and sex," answered the marquise, fiercely.

"And I am sorry to decline the satisfaction unless you are inclined to exchange confidences," was the cool response.

"That is impossible."

"Agreed."

"But I insist on an explanation, Lord Dunallan," argued the marquise, more calmly. "Between gentlemen there should be some slight code of honour, whether friends or foes. And I tell you, as a gentleman, that I neither can nor will betray the secret of this young lady's history, though I know it as a sad and strange reality."

"And I equally assert that I neither can nor will betray the secret of the young lady's home or her protector," sneered Lord Dunallan. "It is enough that I know it, and have access to it. I leave you to judge for yourself what respect she paid to my interference in the matter, and the evidence it gives of the truth of my assertion. Take my advice and leave the affair alone, Mayfield. You seem wondrously inclined to poach on other men's preserves," he added, with a cynical smile.

Digby Mayfield had a retort ready on his lips. He was about to reveal the real tie that bound him to this beautiful waif on the world's shore. But even as the words trembled on his lips they died away under the consciousness that the betrayal would entail an explanation of the past that would commit far more interests than his own to the mercy of a stranger to those principally concerned.

"I am more than inclined—I am resolved to interfere with another man's vicious pleasures," he returned, angrily. "I will spoil your game, Lord Dunallan, or else expose you when you those least desire or expect it."

And without another word he turned on his heel and in a few moments was in his brougham and driving rapidly away to Lord St. Columb's. The viscount paused awhile in quiet thought that appeared little ruffled by the late encounter, but in a little time he too followed his antagonist's example and took his way to his own apartments.

"Silly fellow," he muttered, sneeringly, "he does not know what he is about. I was in the field long before him, and what is more, there is a secret I will not rest till I have discovered

as to this girl. And that once at my mercy, his scheme will be checkmated at a move. Only," he added, more thoughtfully, "I must be very sure myself what I mean—Agatha or Leila, the peer's daughter or the pauper companion. Egbert Dunallan, you are an idiot where women are in question, but what then! Vogue la galère. One can but enjoy life while it lasts, and then—and then who knows, and who cares?"

(To be Continued.)

ON THE MORROW YOU'LL BE GONE.

Oh, sad and heavy is my heart,
Its throbbings are so sore;
Oh, why—why from me wilt thou part,
To see perhaps no more?
I weep—you see these little tears
That roll down one by one;
They are my heart's bright hopes, dull
fears,
For on the morrow you'll be gone.

Yes, on the morrow you'll be gone
And leave me lonely here,
To weep, to think on joys bygone,
That now will seem so dear.
And when thou art in that far clime,
So far from friends so kind,
Cast off a thought to this sweet time,
And her you leave behind.

But when away from me thou'rt gone,
Think not thou art from view;
For bright as day within my heart,
There shines the form of you.
And, dearest, though you must away
To lands beneath a glowing sun,
Oft will my lips sweet prayers say,
And wish thee well, my darling one.

I well may sigh that heavy sigh,
'Twas one that spoke of woe;
It came from this poor heart of mine,
Where grief seems there to grow.
Oh! must you go and leave me here?
Oh! what will be my lot?
But fare thee well since then you
must,
Ay, fondest, dearest thought.

List to that little zephyr sigh,
It speaks as if divine;
'Tis like a spirit moving by,
Which whispers into mine,
A hope to raise my drooping heart
That sighs so much for you.
Oh! fare thee well, since we must
part,
One long, one last adieu. S. B. N.

"THE 'ROBIN' DINNERS."

A CHRISTMAS movement, inaugurated in London three years ago, under the significant name of "The 'Robin' Dinners," promises to become a settled metropolitan institution.

The movement owes its origin to a Christmas Carol, written by the editor of "Hand and Heart," and published in that journal. The first year three or four hundred "Robin" guests were entertained; the next year the number reached to 3,000; and last year about 10,000 guests were included.

We have received an illustrated volume, published for the benefit of the fund, entitled "Robin's Carol, and What Came of It," which gives the full history of what has been already done. The compiler says, "'Robin's' Carol, and What Came of It," is becoming quite a romantic story. Truth is stranger than fiction; and the 'Robin Dinners' have opened out some pages of London life which we would not forget for all the romances in the world."

With the view of perpetuating and multiply-

ing these pages of London life by similar records in future years, contributions are again invited; and although London is said to contain nearly 500,000 children who would rejoice to be "made happy for an evening," and the cost to welcome them, at sixpence each for the dinner and evening's entertainment, would require no less than £12,500, the compiler says:—"We are bold enough to entertain the hope that in due time—the earlier the better—every poor child in London will know by happy experience what a 'Robin Dinner' is."

We are glad, therefore, to see that in order to promote "'Robin' Dinners" out of London, a plan has been devised which we hope some Lady Bountiful in our own neighbourhood will utilise. A collecting form, which accompanies the volume, states that:—"An Engraving, illustrative of the 'Robin Dinners,' printed on special plate paper, and well worthy of a frame, will be sent, at the cost of eight shillings per 100, to any friends who may wish to establish a 'Dinner' in their own localities. Assuming that each copy realised a contribution of one shilling, 100 copies will thus secure £4 12s. towards the expenses. All letters relative to Robin's Work should be addressed to 'Robin,' 7, The Paragon, Blackheath, S.E."

JAPANESE CHILDREN.

ONE of the first lessons presented to a foreign teacher in Japan is the reason of the great apparent happiness and light-heartedness of Japanese children. One may walk for hours through the streets of Tokio, and scarcely ever hear a child's cry of distress. Four principal causes of this superiority of the children of Japan over those of other nations have been suggested by an English lady resident there. They are worthy the attention of the teachers at home:—

1. The style of clothing, loose and yet warm, is far more comfortable than the dress of our children.

2. The absence of furniture, and therefore the absence of repeatedly-given instructions "not to touch." The thick, soft matting, forming at once the carpet and beds of all Japanese houses, and the raised lintel on to which the child may clamber as it grows strong, constitutes the very beau-ideal of an infant's playground.

3. Japanese children are much more out in the open air and sunshine.

4. Children are much petted, without being capriciously thwarted. A child is not cuffed one moment and indulged the next.

To these suggestive reasons may be added a fifth, which is, that Japanese character is so constituted as to bring their elders into strong sympathy with the little ones. It has been well said that "Japan is a paradise of babies," for you may see old and young playing together at battle-door and shuttle-cock in the streets; while on holidays the national amusement of men, women and children is flying huge paper kites. Puppet-shows and masquerades also have their votaries in thousands, from among all sexes and both ages.

MDLLE. X., a pretty young actress, has hands so red as to resemble lobsters. She is a most charming young person, said Gondinet, but her hands are rather bashful.

SOME of the new Parisian slipper rosettes are nearly big enough to hide the whole instep. They begin near the toe with a small buckle and are composed of small shell-like loops of satin placed close together to the depth of four inches.

SCENE in a Paris restaurant. Customer: "Waiter, I can't get on with this lobster; it's as hard as flint." Waiter: "Beg pardon, sir; a slight mistake. That's the papier mâché lobster out of the show-case! Shall I change it?"

VIRTUE is said to be its own reward; but can you show us a person who is satisfied with the wages.

SPHINX.

I.

CONUNDRUM.

How does Ireland at the present moment
resemble a home without the family head?
S. B. N.

II.

CHARADE.

When I think but a while
O'er my head there does pile
Reflections that bring to my view
My first, sweet and fair,
With the form all my care;
Believe all I say is quite true.

When I think but a while
O'er my first 'twas a smile
That my second I feel e'er my heart;
It came slow but sure,
And I feel ne'er a cure
Will I get till death doth us part.

If you both parts do now unite
'Twill give a pain, no great delight,
To wish for it I never do,
And if you find neither will you.

S. B. N.

III.

CURTAILED WORDS.

1. Curtail a point and leave a kind of pulse.
2. Curtail a long tube and leave a spot on cards.
3. Curtail a small shallow dish and leave to weave.
4. Curtail something grown and leave a plot or contrivance.
5. Curtail sympathy and leave a deep hole in the earth.
6. Curtail a game of cards and leave to irritate.
6. Curtail willingly and leave a falsehood.

LOADAMIA.

IV.

NUMERICAL ENIGMA.

I am composed of 11 letters.

My 1, 2, 4, 5, 6 is to be fond of;
My 3, 5, 6, is a boy's name;
My 7, 2, 8, 3 is an animal;
My 6, 8, 9, 10 is a bird;
My 11, 5, 9, 10, 3 is a number;
My whole is a tale in the LONDON
READER. G. M.

V.

BEHEADED WORDS.

1. Behead an eminence and leave an odour.
2. To aim at and leave a steeple.
3. The backbone and leave a tree.
4. A pointed piece of iron and leave a fish.
5. A short space of time and leave a kitchen utensil.
6. To plunge suddenly into water and leave an English river.
7. To toss and leave to toss.
8. A wanderer and leave above.
9. A habitation and leave to portend.
10. Wide and leave an open way.
11. Once more and leave to obtain.
12. Solitary and leave solitary.

LOADAMIA.

VI.

CHARADE.

In murders often am I used,
I'm of great use, but oft abused,
In fact, in every house you'll find
One of my many different kinds.
In offices, in homes though bare,
In palaces you'll find me there,
In butchers', grocers' shops as well;
Now guess, and what I am do tell.
S. B. N.

VII.

NUMERICAL ENIGMA.

I am composed of 13 letters.

My 4, 8, 9 is what you sit in at church.
My 11, 3, 13 is part of a head.
My 2, 12, 13, 6 is a boy's name.
My 7, 11, 9 is when just made.
My 1, 5, 11 is an animal.
My 2, 12, 10 is what horses eat.
My whole is what I hope we shall all
enjoy. G. M.

VIII.

CHARADE.

I ran another man a mile
And kept my first till done,
And all the time my second looked
At us, till I had won,
But many oft my whole did do
While still we both did run;
Now if you find I'd ask of you
Ne'er through this life it ever do.
S. B. N.

IX.

DOUBLE ACROSTIC.

My first I saw sweet Mary do
When I to her some kisses threw;
My second painters ne'er abuse,
Because they always do it use;
My third does give a lady's name—
I know one who does bear the same,
And she my fourth has quite a share
'Tis highly pleasing to see it there;
And yet, poor thing, my fifth is oft,
For doctors say her brain is soft;
My sixth a seaport town will show,
In Ireland, in the county Sligo;
My seventh is a greasy compound,
Invariably in candles found.
Now if you all do find aright
The letters first and last
Will name two cities widely known,
In trading unsurpassed. S. B. N.

X.

CHARADE.

My first came in use when I came to
the gate
Of our garden, where Flora's bright
beauties are seen,
And as I looked round me my pleasures
were great,
For 'twas with my first that I'd made
such a scene.

But I find that my second as well was
in use,
For I came to a boulder that lay in
my way;
Then my first took my second and
worked it aside,
And there it is lying to this very
day.

But it was through that boulder my
father and I
Had my third, and really 'twas
serious to me,
But after my third on the lake he and
I
Were pleasant and happy as both
we could be.

But unfortunate I got again in a
scrape,
For my whole so stupidly lay in my
way,
And I actually tumbled and hurt my
first,
And my third again came into play.

And I felt so wild I could have used
My second with the greatest ease,
But I lifted my whole and laid it
aside,
So, guessors, find it, if you please.
S. B. N.

XI.

NUMERICAL ENIGMA.

Whole I am a Christmas dish, dear to
every Englishman's heart, and
consist of 9 letters.

My 1, 2, 5 is to decay;
My 1, 3, 5 is a quadruped;
My 1, 3, 5, 7 is to scold;
My 6, 7, 8 is an insect;
My 2, 3, 5, 4 is a kind of grain;
My 6, 7, 3, 4, 5 is an irrational animal;
My 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 is a style of cooking;
My 6, 7, 8, 9 is a kind of meat;
My 9, 8, 3, 1 is that which no English
man should feel;
My 6, 8, 3, 1 is a quadruped;
And my 5, 7, 3, 1 is that which is often
shed. LOADAMIA.

ANSWERS will appear in No. 809 of the
LONDON READER.

MARRIED IN A HURRY.

JANUARY and May were linked together in a waiting-room of the Railway at R—, recently. They arrived by the train and walked briskly across the platform. A clergyman was waiting for them, and a carriage had been engaged to take them to his residence where the ceremony was to be performed. The bridegroom hastily inquired when the next train was due, and on being told that only five minutes would elapse before that event, he ejaculated:

"I am in a hurry! We must return by the next train! It's going to rain!"

They entered the humble waiting-room. The hands of the clock moved. The station-master suggested that the time was "only two minutes now." Just then the train rounded the curve, approaching the station. The bridegroom's agitation was evinced by beads of perspiration on an ample forehead fringed with a few tufts of grey hair—all that remained from the snows of seventy winters. Little May, with the innocence of girlhood in her eyes, was in a flutter. The clergyman alone was cool and self-possessed.

"Join hands!" he cried, as the locomotive shrieked. "You take this man to be your husband?" he demanded sternly, as the porter gave the bell a vigorous shake.

"Yes," whispered nervous May, as the train rattled by, with the brakes grinding and the engine sputtering.

"You take this woman to be your wife?" asked the clergyman, with his hand on the bridegroom's arm.

"Yes," quoth January, fumbling his railway pass and taking the spectacles from his nose, just as a heavy trunk was dumped off the platform and the locomotive again found its voice.

"Then I pronounce you man and wife," exclaimed the good man, and the guard's "All right," came in like an "Amen."

The bride was bundled into a compartment, there was a transfer of silver from bridegroom to clergyman, the cabman murmured, "Darn it, I've lost a job," and January was nearly carried off his legs on the platform.

Their wedding journey had begun.

A NEWSPAPER reporter who died recently left a large sum of money behind him. In fact he left all the money there was in the world.

NINE ladies have secured seats on the New London School Board viz., Mrs. Westlake in Marylebone, Mrs. Fenwick Miller in Hackney, Mrs. Surr in Finsbury, Mrs. Richardson and Miss Taylor in Southwark, Miss Rosamond Davenport-Hill for the City, Miss Edith Simcox for Westminster, Mrs. Webster for Chelsea, and Miss Muller for Lambeth.

LINKED LOVES.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

"Clarice Villiers; or, What Love Feared."

CHAPTER XI.

A fortnight had passed, and a considerable number of the guests assembled at Caerlan had taken their departure, amongst the exceptions being Lord Fitzvesci. The young soldier had been assiduous and marked in his attentions to Miss Glendyr during the interim, but he could read little in the heiress's manner to encourage him in the supposition that he had made much way towards gaining her heart. That Winefrede liked him as a guest of her mother, or even as a partner in the ball-room or a companion for a canter along the hilly roads, was unquestionable; but this was a very slender basis for a lover to build hopes upon.

As the viscount's leave of absence was drawing to a close he became, not unnaturally, somewhat anxious to have a definite engagement concluded between Winefrede and himself before he rejoined his regiment, which was then on home service. He knew that the admiral, Mrs. Glendyr, and Oscar all approved of his pretensions, and had decided that he would not leave Caerlan until the daughter of the house was his betrothed. But like all proud men of rather cold temperament, Alan Fitzvesci would have preferred that Winefrede had displayed some little indication that she could learn to care for him. He knew that the pride of the heiress was scarcely less than his, and that if she had allowed any sign of partiality for himself to escape her such sign would be of the very minutest character, and almost unrecognisable save to the eyes of love. But the young viscount's most careful watching could not avail to detect even the shadow of any such feeling on Miss Glendyr's part, and Fitzvesci had to acknowledge to himself with considerable vexation that he should be reduced to the necessity of making a proposal of marriage to a woman in the most utter ignorance of her sentiments towards him.

That Winefrede was heart free Alan had but little doubt. The girl's mother, grandfather and brother had affirmed the fact with decisive unanimity. Fitzvesci, after making the acquaintance of most of the eligible parties in the neighbourhood of Caerlan, was not particularly surprised that they had failed to win Miss Glendyr's favouring notice, and considered it a testimony to her good taste. And although himself a man of too haughty a spirit to be susceptible of vanity, the viscount was by no means insensible to the fact that, apart from his rank and social position, his personal advantages were far superior to those of the neighbouring young Welsh squires to whom he had been introduced.

Nevertheless, there was one male inmate of the castle who, as Lord Fitzvesci acknowledged to himself with some chagrin, was far more highly gifted than himself, both in physical strength and good looks and in mental accomplishments. But that man was a stranger—a dependent, nothing to Lord Fitzvesci, nothing to Winefrede Glendyr, neither then nor ever. The young soldier had to assure himself of both these facts so frequently during his cogitations on affairs at the castle that it argued a doubt in his own mind on either point.

Somehow he could not bring himself to feel that in truth Valentine Ponsonby was nothing to him. The young man had saved his life, and the debt of gratitude remained due therefor. It was an obligation which grew daily more and more intolerable to the perverted pride of the young nobleman. He had tried every device of which he could think to force Valentine to accept some favour or advantage at his hands, which the donor might consider as at least a partial equivalent.

He had even descended to what might be deemed the discourtesy of endeavouring to thrust upon the new manager a big cheque of four figures on the ground that Valentine, as a

young man, must have occasion for spare cash. It was all in vain. Ponsonby refused all Fitzvesci's proffers, genially and kindly and with full appreciation of the soldier's good intentions towards him, but decisively nevertheless.

In making these proposals to Valentine, the young viscount never relaxed from his air of distance and superiority, and if sometimes touched apparently by Alan's proffers of assistance Ponsonby assumed any approach to friendliness or familiarity, the viscount immediately assumed his iciest demeanour, and froze all such demonstrations to instant silence.

Indeed, in place of any friendliness towards Mrs. Glendyr's manager, Lord Fitzvesci was rapidly developing a dislike which might ripen into hatred. The feeling was due in its inception to jealousy. Absurd as he told himself such a supposition was, Lord Fitzvesci could not, nevertheless, divest himself of the notion that Winefrede Glendyr and Valentine Ponsonby had some such affinity to each other as would under other circumstances than those in which they were placed have perhaps ripened into love.

Not that he felt any fear on that score as things were. Miss Glendyr was no sentimental girl to be drawn into a mesalliance. Nor could Fitzvesci refuse to avow to himself that Ponsonby showed no slightest tokens of any desire to entangle the heiress in anything of the kind. It almost seemed on the contrary that Valentine sedulously avoided Winefrede so far as practicable.

That might, however, be finesse and the clever acting of a deep schemer. Upon that point Alan Fitzvesci could come to no satisfactory conclusion. He knew that Miss Glendyr preserved a distant air towards the manager, and on the occasions of their meeting their opinions were often antagonistic.

He was confident that no slightest look or word passed between them on which the most rabid jealousy could seize, but yet—yet against his better judgment—Lord Fitzvesci always came back to the same end of his train of reasoning upon the subject—namely, that had his social status permitted Valentine Ponsonby would have wooed and won Winefrede Glendyr.

Valentine passed hastily from the castle and crossed the rear lawn, with the evident intention of crossing what was termed the back park and striking into a woodland path which led to one of the outlying farms. But before he had reached the little grassy causeway across the ha-ha which divided the lawn from the park, his ears were saluted by a shrill cry of: "Mr. Ponsonby, stay! Here is something which you have dropped!"

The young man turned and confronted the governess, who, attired in a charming morning toilette, advanced to meet him. Miss Vanneck held in her hand a tiny morocco-covered book.

"Oh, my Horace," said Valentine, "I feared that I had lost it."

He extended his hand for it. As he did so, Judith opened the cover. There was a small printed label on the inside of the board on which was a coat-of-arms and crest.

"Are these the armoinal bearings of your family, Mr. Ponsonby?" she queried, indifferently, but with a steady look at Valentine.

The young man bit his lip angrily, and hesitated a moment before he replied in the affirmative.

"A very pretty blazonry. I fancy I have seen something like it before, but then I don't understand heraldry," and she handed the book to him.

"Confound it! How could I be so incautious?" he muttered. "The book is the only relic of the past which I retain, and this is the last place upon earth in which it should be left lying about. And this governess appears to be quite unnecessarily inquisitive. I must beware of Miss Vanneck. It is not the first time that I have suspected her of possessing a very prying temperament."

CHAPTER XII.

MAY had come—beautiful "yonge freshe May," as our quaint old English poet phrases it. Nature had sprung into sudden life among the valleys and heights which surrounded Caerlan. In the hedgerows the elms put on their delicate garniture of greenery and the hawthorn its wealth of snowy blossoms; over the broad brown fields spread the soft verdancy of the young wheat; high in the azure air the skylark poised himself in a flood of melody.

The time of "the singing of birds had come," and all nature rejoiced with a joy in which man shared. None more than Valentine Ponsonby. He was an artist of no mean merit, and finding himself placed amidst some of the most picturesque scenery of our island, had commenced to transfer it to Bristol-board or to canvas.

A prolonged time of unfavourable weather had put a stop to this for some time, and the advent of a sunny May day was hailed by the young manager as a pleasant occasion of employing his leisure. He was so engaged in a rapid and clever water-colour sketch of a celebrated picturesque "bit" on the shore of a tiny mountain lake about a couple of miles from the castle, and had become thoroughly absorbed in the effort to transfer some evanescent and varying cloud effects before they should flit away, when a voice at his side startled him from his occupation.

"You work with the true artist energy and inspiration, it appears, Mr. Ponsonby."

The young man looked up. Miss Winefrede Glendyr was standing beside him eyeing the sketch with a certain critical interest. She was in her riding dress, and about a hundred yards off under the trees her mounted groom was holding the girl's horse. She had evidently alighted to inspect Mr. Ponsonby's work, and her light step upon the grass had been unheard by him.

He arose instantly, and, with a bow, removed the camp-stool upon which he had been seated a little farther back, in order that should Miss Glendyr occupy it she might view the picture from a favourable distance.

"I lay no claim to the true artistic faculty, Miss Glendyr," he said. "I am simply a painstaking amateur."

"Well, the result seems to me equally good. It is true that I am but a poor judge of pictorial art, and have, indeed, little relish for it—there is only one thing I care for less."

"And that is?"

"Poetry, or what they call poetry in our day."

"It is rare to hear a young lady make such an avowal as that," Valentine remarked.

"Do you think so? And, pray, why should she not?"

"I hardly know. But as the poet paints in glowing words all that is true and beautiful and loveable, it may be that we expect that sex which is all these itself to sympathise with the lay of the singer more than man can do."

Miss Glendyr gave a curious dry little laugh.

"You are a poet yourself, I fancy," she said.

"No; only so far as the appreciation goes. But I can say in the words of a great bard, that poetry has been to me its own exceeding great reward."

Miss Glendyr sat silent for a few moments, her eyes fixed thoughtfully upon the picture.

"You have many pursuits, Mr. Ponsonby, wherewith to amuse yourself in the intervals of business," she remarked, presently.

Commonplace as was the observation, it excited no little astonishment in the young man's mind. Never before, since the first two or three days of his sojourn at Caerlan, had Winefrede Glendyr deigned to initiate a conversation with him, with the one exception that on the morrow following the wreck she had poured forth her grateful thanks in a few earnest words, and immediately froze again to her usual reticence and calm.

It was not, of course, that the girl refused to take part in any general conversation in the family circle when Ponsonby was present, but

that she had distinctly avoided having speech with him when others were not by.

"It is well to keep one's faculties from rusting," Valentine replied, with a pleasant smile. "And the romantic beauty of your wild land seems to make an irresistible appeal to even so poor an artist as myself."

"You do yourself an injustice, Mr. Ponsonby. To me it appears that the sketch is masterly. The subject, however, does not appeal to me, for I have little romance or poetry in my composition"—And she gave a little laugh, which had a scornful ripple. "But do you know mamma is very jealous of your exclusive attention to your artistic pursuits."

"Indeed! I hope I have neglected nothing which comes within my duties," responded Valentine, with a shade of reserve.

"Oh, no. It is only, I believe, that she sees much less of you now, and misses your advice and assistance. You know how highly she values both—they are not less indispensable to her than to my grandpapa. You are, indeed, the family adviser in general."

Valentine laughingly disclaimed the compliment.

"But it is so, and I can assure you that it is because mamma feels your defection keenly, and has formed the strangest idea of its cause, that I have decided to speak to you concerning it."

"Its cause! I do not understand you, Miss Glendyr."

"It is only since Lord Fitzvesci has been our guest that you have deserted us. Is it not due to the fact that there is some enmity between you? Perhaps I overpass my province in putting such a question."

"No!" cried Valentine, "I appreciate to the full your kindly interest. But you are altogether in error. Lord Alan Fitzvesci has no more earnest well-wisher than myself. I owe it as a debt to another that it should be so."

The young man spoke with the emphasis of sincerity, but his face was strangely grave, even stern.

Winefrede Glendyr glanced up at his set countenance with sudden curiosity.

"Another?" she queried.

"Yes."

"I was not aware that you and Lord Fitzvesci had been acquainted previous to your meeting here."

Valentine looked at the speaker with a meditative, half-absent regard.

"No, no!" he murmured, in a tone inaudible to his companion, "that secret must not be divulged. But this is my opportunity to keep my promise to Sir Cynric, and bitter though the task is, it shall be done." Then aloud: "The other of whom I spake is Miss Winefrede Glendyr. For her sake at least, if for no other cause, I should be Lord Fitzvesci's well-wisher."

The girl arose suddenly and drew herself up proudly.

"I do not understand you, Mr. Ponsonby! What have I to do with the matter?"

"Because you are" (he made a long pause), "I hope, Lord Fitzvesci's fiancée."

All the habitual hauteur of look and manner had returned to Winefrede and banished summarily her momentary unbending.

"It appears to me, Mr. Ponsonby, that you have no right to form conjectures or found hopes upon any such subject."

A rapid flush crossed the young man's open brow, leaving it paler than before.

"Perhaps you are right, Miss Glendyr," he said, gently. "But I have learned to take a strong interest in all that concerns your family."

"And who has taught you to dare connect my name with that of Lord Fitzvesci—Miss Vanneck or some of the servants, I presume?"

"I know that the alliance is one on which Sir Cynric Rhys has set his heart. I think too that if his strong desire for it be disappointed the last feeble strands of his thread of life will part. I have learned to love him almost as a parent, and"—the speaker paused, then concluded by a painful effort—"his hopes and wishes I have made my own."

A perfect tempest of angry passion swept away the girl's studied calmness.

"If it is of any interest to you to know it, Mr. Ponsonby," she cried, with wrathful emphasis, "learn that Lord Fitzvesci neither is nor can be caught but a friend."

At the passionate declaration Valentine's eyelids drooped suddenly and veiled the sudden and irrepressible gleam of exultation which sprang to the orbs beneath.

"But I had not thought to find you playing so mean a part as that of making a poor old dotting man the butt of your inquisitive questions concerning the private affairs of the family whose paid dependent you are!" pursued the girl, with unabated anger. "It is a breach of confidence which nothing can extenuate—certainly not the apology which I see you are about to make to me."

The young man faced Miss Glendyr with a mien which had become suddenly as proud as her own.

"You are mistaken, Miss Glendyr," he said, quietly. "Sir Cynric's confidences to me were unsolicited. My interest in him alone permitted me to become their recipient. That I am the paid dependent you term me is true. That fact brings no shame to me. You must judge for yourself whether the ungenerous taunt you have hurled at one who has done you no wrong be not a deeper discredit to you."

"Have you forgotten that I am at least a woman, sir?" the girl exclaimed, with flashing eyes. And that the fact should be my protection from any breath of discourtesy, such as that for which I still wait your apology."

"Most assuredly, Miss Glendyr, if either of us should ask pardon, it is you. You are rich and I am poor. You are proud and I am humble. You, therefore, have the power to humiliate yourself—a privilege which my mean station denies to me."

Winefrede Glendyr stood for a moment gazing at the young man's pale set, yet motionless countenance, as if stricken dumb by Valentine's audacity. Then, as he stood fronting her with his arms crossed on his chest, as if waiting for her to speak, the girl suddenly turned from him and swept with a haughty gait in the direction of her horse. But a sudden impulse of better feeling caused her to stay her steps abruptly, and turned back.

"I ask your pardon for my hasty word," she said, with a proud humility, the pallor of her beautiful face bearing witness to strong, but suppressed emotions, extending her delicately-gauntleted hand and withdrawing it quickly. Then turning hurried to her horse.

Valentine made a hasty movement to follow and assist her to mount, but before he could reach the spot, the girl had placed her slender foot in the groom's palm and had vaulted to the saddle with the agility of an Amazon, and, sharply spurring her mare to a rapid canter, was soon hidden from sight by the windings of the hedge-bounded road.

Valentine Ponsonby returned to his picture, but not to lift pencil again that day.

"I cannot go on enduring this," he said, moodily. "The ordeal is too bitter. What were the lowest toil, privation, even wait—death itself to the misery of such a position as this in which I find myself? I felt a prevision of the danger on the first moment in which I looked on Winefrede Glendyr's fair face, but I had thought that I was less weak than I find myself to be. Then when he came, it seemed to me that if I could gain his affection and esteem I could forget, or root out the other love. If I had gained his, perhaps it might have led the way to the winning of my—No, I dare not even hope for that. But I cannot remain here. I shall become unfaithful to my trust and honour. I will write to Swire, at Antwerp, and ask him to rescind my engagement for six months."

Miss Vanneck was busily engaged in turning over the leaves of a portly volume and attentively scrutinising certain pages. The quaint figures, vivid colours, and glitter of gold and silver foil showed that the book treated of the blazonry of coat-armour. Presently she raised

her head with a dubious and puzzled air and glanced round on the different occupants of the room.

"Are you anything of a herald, my lord?" she inquired of Fitzvesci, who was seated in a gossip-chair not far from the table upon which she had placed the book on bringing it from the library. Judith put the question in a rather subdued tone, which was scarcely audible at the other side of the room, where Valentine Ponsonby was standing, portfolio in hand, engaged in showing some recent sketches to Mrs. Glendyr.

"I know something of it," Lord Fitzvesci replied. "The time was when it was as much a part of a gentleman's education as the ability to couch a lance fairly, or touch a lute with grace. And although the days of chivalry are over I suppose most men of family still know something of the old science."

"Ah, then perhaps you can help me. Look at these coats of arms," and Miss Vanneck fluttered a score of the blazoned leaves.

A scarcely perceptible contraction came to Alan Fitzvesci's brow.

"Those are the arms and crests of the various branches of the Ponsonbys. The name is placed beneath each. But what then?"

"Then there must be other arms appertaining to the family or its branches."

The viscount turned over the leaves indifferently, referred to the index and looked at the title-page.

"I should think all the legitimate coats of arms which appertain to those bearing the name of Ponsonby are here. It seems an exhaustive collection."

"What do you mean by the phrase you have just used?"

Lord Fitzvesci laughed a little bitterly.

"Merely this. In the good old days the insignia painted on a man's shield, or the crest which surmounted his helmet, bore witness to brave acts done, or fought on field for king and fatherland. But now, in these degenerate times, when money will do everything, any retired butter merchant, or wholesale tallow-chandler, can get Herald's College to grant him a coat-of-arms—say three Dutch cheeses in gold on an azure field, or something of that kind."

"You are sarcastic, my lord. But you are quite wrong about the Ponsonbys. There is another armorial bearing of theirs, although I cannot find it in this book. Stay, I will show you, roughly, what it is."

Judith Vanneck took out a small gold pencil-case, and turning to a blank leaf at the end of the book, drew a slight sketch by a few deft and rapid strokes. At each line she added Lord Fitzvesci's attention increased—at each stroke his brow darkened more and more. When the governess had done she looked up at him inquiringly, for he had arisen from his seat and stood watching her work.

"What is that?" he asked in a deep strange voice.

"Those are the arms of a branch of the Ponsonbys."

"Which?"

"The one to which Mr. Valentine Ponsonby belongs."

"Does he say so?"

"Oh, certainly. It was he who told me," and Judith Vanneck looked up at her companion's angry face with a well simulated surprise; "he has it printed on a place in his books."

"Then he is a base impostor!"

Lord Fitzvesci's tones were much louder and more impressive—indeed, violent—than the usages of good society tolerate. They rang sharply through the room, and drew the attention of all present to the speaker and his companion.

"Oh, who is it of whom you are speaking?" cried Mrs. Glendyr, with languid curiosity, as she agitated her fan. "Have any of those dreadful betting-men been robbing you of any money?"

"No one has been robbing me of money," responded the viscount, in a voice of concentrated passion, "but there is one under this roof who



[A LOVER OF NATURE.]

has done an act far more vile—one who has presumed to steal the honours of our race and prostitute them to his own base purposes."

All the company turned upon the excited young man looks expressive of the extremest amazement.

"Fitzvesci must have had too much wine," whispered young Ap-Howel to his mamma.

"What are you saying, my lord?" said Sir Cynric Rhys, sternly. "Do you desire to insult me and my guests by such a mad accusation?"

"Mad! It is true; and the guilty man knows that it is true. 'Your guest.' No, Sir Cynric, he is no guest of yours. I allude to the 'gentleman,'" with sarcastic emphasis upon the word, "who calls himself Valentine Ponsonby—your manager, steward, servant, or whatever he may be."

All eyes were turned on Valentine. The young man's face was deadly pale, and his features worked with ill-suppressed emotion.

"Valentine!" cried Sir Cynric.

Ponsonby stepped to the admiral's side. The old man laid his thin hand on the manager's arm and felt that it trembled.

"My lord!" exclaimed Winefrede, taking the word before her grandfather or her mother had collected themselves sufficiently for farther query, "I think you owe us some explanation of this unusual and unseemly violence."

The girl's interference appeared to add fuel to Alan Fitzvesci's passion.

"Not much explanation is needed, Miss Glendyr," he responded. "The case is simply this. Everyone knows the armorial bearings of the Fitzvescis. They were won on the red field of Evesham; they received honourable addition at the battles of Barnet and of Marston Moor. Their proud insignia are ours and ours only. No other member of the peerage—far less any historic commoner—has any share in them. Yet here I find an unknown plebeian—one not even of our name, as indeed how could he be?—who dares to assume these arms and parade them publicly even in the house where I have the honour to be a visitor."

"Is this true, Mr. Ponsonby?" queried the admiral, gravely.

"It is true, Sir Cynric," Valentine replied, in a low voice.

"He confesses it—by heavens, the scoundrel avows it!" exclaimed the viscount.

Valentine made a step forward, his face working convulsively. Then he stopped as suddenly, with his hands clenched.

"You must not be so violent, my lord," said Sir Cynric, with dignity, which did not, however, hide considerable agitation. "There is here, no doubt, some absurd mistake easy of explanation. Is it not so, Ponsonby?"

"I have nothing to explain, Sir Cynric," Valentine answered, in a broken voice.

"But, my dear fellow, act like a sensible man. Everyone knows that there is but one family entitled to bear the Fitzvesci coat-armour. I presume this is some silly jest, of which, by the way, I could not have imagined you capable. Well, only one course remains to you as a man of honour. Acknowledge the folly and apologise to Fitzvesci, for, 'pon my soul, I think he has some cause for irritation."

Valentine made no reply. He stood there unblenchingly. Very pale and with troubled eyes, but calmer now, and breathing heavily with those deep laboured inspirations with which men prepare to face a terrible ordeal. The spectators stood around in the various states of painful excitement which this singular fracas was so well fitted to inspire.

The old admiral stern and erect, Mrs. Glendyr limp and scared, looking helplessly from one of the young men to the other, Winefrede pale, with her large eyes fixed with a painful inquiring gaze on Valentine's face, the Ap-Howels wearing expressions of pleased sarcasm, and Judith Vanneck holding a lace-fringed handkerchief to her eyes as a judicious screen for their satisfaction.

"The convicted impostor!" cried the viscount.

Again Valentine made a step or two in the direction of his denouncer, and again he suddenly restrained himself. Then he turned

abruptly, and without a word made for a door of the room.

At that juncture Lord Fitzvesci's eyes fell on a heavy dog-whip which Miss Glendyr usually carried when she went abroad with Rescuer, the great Mont St. Bernard hound, and which lay in an embrasure of a window. Seizing it he sprang after Valentine Ponsonby and lashed at him fiercely. The long supple lash curled around the retreating man's shoulders and neck, and struck him in the face with such force that when he turned and confronted his aggressor his visage bore a long crimson weal from temple to cheek.

"That is a lesson for you, my fine fellow, against taking what is not yours!" cried the viscount.

With a sudden bound, Ponsonby sprang upon Fitzvesci, tore the whip from his grasp, and hurled it far out through an open window.

"I have never taken aught of living man!" he cried, hoarsely, "until that coward blow."

"Ah, you still dare to persist in your imposition," retorted Fitzvesci, his eyes blazing. "Perhaps I can read the explanation of your audacity. But if so, learn that if your mother was frail, and a Fitzvesci honoured her by his notice, our ancient arms, as little as our old name, can never be claimed by one baseborn!"

The words were hardly out of the soldier's lips ere, with a leopard spring, Ponsonby was upon him. The viscount was as a very child in the hands of the man whom he had insulted. Seizing him by breast and haunch, Valentine lifted the young nobleman high in the air, and the next moment would have dashed him violently to the floor before any of the spectators could have interfered, but for a quick revulsion in his own feelings, which impelled him to place the discomfited soldier gently on his feet again.

"May Heaven forgive both you and me, my lord!" Valentine exclaimed, in choking accents. "We have both ample need of its mercy!" and he rushed from the room.

(To be Continued.)



[AFTER THE OPERA.]

UNDER A LOVE CHARM; OR, A SECRET WRONG.

BY THE AUTHOR OF

*"Christine's Revenge; or, O'Hara's Wife,"**"The Mystery of His Love; or, Who Married Them?" &c., &c.*

CHAPTER XXVIII.

SIR PETER LINGHAM.

The lost days of my life, what would they be
If I could see them strewn upon the street
Just where they fell. Would they be ears of
wheat
Sown once for pods and trodden into clay,
Or coins of gold, squandered and still to pay?

"I am an ugly old man, most beautiful young lady," said Sir Peter Lingham to Leontine Melrose, "and I suppose many people would think me an old idiot for what I am about to say to you; but I shall say it nevertheless. I have long been looking out for a wife. I sought in her beauty, youth, wisdom and goodness. I cared for nothing else, because, you see, I understand the world and humanity at large well enough to be aware that it is impossible to find every advantage combined in the same person, thus beauty and youth, and wisdom and goodness would most likely belong to some sweet creature of obscure birth and empty coffers. Very likely the little divinity, as I said to myself, will have a number of poor relations dependent on her earnings, and she herself will occupy no higher position than that of barmaid at a refreshment counter at a railway station, or female ticket clerk at some country railway, or she may be a 'young person' behind a counter in a drapery establishment.

"I am Sir Peter Lingham, of Hazlemere

Hall, in the county of York, and my family is as old as the hills of my native land. I am rich—so rich that my lands and my rents are a burden to me, and I am childless. My next heir is a distant cousin—a hardworking man of talent at the Bar whom I cordially detest. Men nearly always hate their direct heirs. My wife died fifteen years ago. All my children died in their infancy; but for a long time I have been saying to myself: I will yet have a wife and a son of my own. I know a dozen poor proud families who would sell their pretty portionless daughters to me if they guessed what was in my mind; but they don't guess it, and then I know what it would be with a large poor family always filling my two houses, town and country, and using them as if they were theirs; besides, I have never met one face among the upper ten at once so good, so gentle, so wise, so beautiful as yours; and the moment I saw you I said to myself: That girl shall be my wife if she has got no other sweetheart, and I will settle seven thousand a year on her at once as pin money.

"As for family and connections I cast them to the winds in your case, because I have enough for both. Now then, my dear, will you have me? I am sixty-two; I am a baronet, and I will make you the most devoted husband under the sun. If you have poor relations you shall settle three hundred a year on them as well as allowing them as much as you like out of your pin money, and you may go and see them when you like; but they must not come to see us unless I especially invite them. Now then, my dear, is it a bargain?"

Leontine thought at first that the odd old man was mad; but she soon found that he was perfectly consistent, that he meant every word he said, and that his admiration—call it love if you like—was very deep and real. At first she was alarmed at the strange wooing of the old baronet.

She arose and left the room, saying that she would return presently, and then she made her way to the drawing-room, where Miss Eva Rod-

ney was practising some music, and she apologised for the intrusion, but related the strange story of Sir Peter's lovmaking, and expressed her belief that the old man was insane; but Eva laughed, clapped her hands, said she was delighted, and called her mother's pretty dependent a little goose for refusing such an offer.

"Unless you have a sweetheart?" Miss Rodney added, suddenly, and she fixed her great black searching eyes on Leontine's fair face.

"Oh, no—no!" said Leontine, blushing crimson. "I have not."

"Then will you be silly enough to refuse to be one of the richest, grandest ladies in London? Think of all that you can do for your parents, about whom you are often so sorrowful."

Leontine did think of them, and the hope of making their desolate, cheerless home bright and happy was like a flood of sunshine let in suddenly upon her sad, darkened soul.

"I can help them," she said to herself. "I can do good to the poor, and nobody in the whole world will care one atom for me."

Nobody meant, in poor Leontine's heart of hearts, Athelstane Rodney. Thus it came to pass that Miss Rodney went into the room where Sir Peter was and brought him into the dining-room where she actually took his jewelled, withered hand and joined it to the pure white hand of poor beautiful Leontine, who stood like one in a dream while this strange betrothal took place.

At her feet there seemed to yawn a black and terrible abyss. How was it that she did not scream aloud and cry, "No—no! Such a marriage is unnatural and unholy." But the memory of the desolate home at Baywater, the fireless grates, the scantily-clad children, the unpaid bills, came to her like a voice of sorrow which called upon her to help the distressed by the sacrifice of all that youth holds dear and precious.

A gallant husband, noble and erect, god-like and true, a home that should be almost a foretaste of Heaven upon earth, cherub children

climbing about her knees; are all these but the idle fantasies of a dream? Henceforth duty—in the shape of a hideous old man with a face like a death's head.

Yes, that person is to be her lord and master, and she is to do her duty by him. Oh, how she shuddered when he drew her to him, and she felt his clammy lips upon her brow.

Eva had been busy telling the old baronet to what family Leontine belonged, and her future lord watched the fair face of his promised girl bride in a perplexed anxiety and fervid admiration. He was an intimate, an "old chum," or had been in the days of his headlong youth and dissipated manhood, of the Earl of Hartbury. Together they had staked large sums on horses, or on dice, and had won or lost according to the caprice of chance, as the case might be.

They had made love each in their own fashion to various grillettes, actresses, milkmaids, and other men's wives. Together they had laughed over the vices, the madnesses, the follies of their golden, misspent youth. They were neither of them good, these rich, courted, well-born, well-bred old men, and as both of them drew near the end of the lives which both of them had lived for themselves and their own pleasures, regrets, reminiscences, recollections came to them day by day, and perhaps it is not too much to say that each of them felt that if he had to live the same number of years over again he would spend them differently.

"And so this beautiful girl who is to be my wife, Lady Lingham, whose portrait is to hang in the picture gallery at Hazlemere, who is to wear the diamonds which my mother wore reset in a queenly setting—this girl is the grandchild of Henry Melrose, Earl of Hartbury. I wonder if she is his legitimate grand-daughter, and if she is I will make him prove her so."

Leontine meanwhile had but little time given her by her devoted but most ugly old admirer to make all the preparations for her approaching marriage. The Rodneys were very kind to her, and entreated her to make their house her home during all the weeks—about five—that were to intervene between that time and her wedding day.

"She was in London, near to the shops," as Lady Rodney said, speaking very kindly and heartily to the beautiful bride expectant, who had been her useful companion. "And you can choose your trousseau so conveniently. Eva will help you."

Life has now a new and dazzling experience for the hitherto repressed and ever toiling Leontine. She had never been happy in her whole life, and now, at least, she was courted, she was rich. Yes, already rich, as she counted riches, for the generous baronet had sent her a cheque for seven hundred pounds wherewith to purchase her trousseau. Jewels he sent in, and such jewels as an earl might send to his promised bride: a set of opals and pearls that a princess might have envied, a set of emeralds, worth half a king's ransom, as Eva, who was most good-naturedly delighted at the pretty dependent's good fortune, averred, and other presents, books, an ivory workbox, fitted up with solid gold scissors, thimbles, &c., which had cost, Eva felt sure, more than two hundred guineas, for when a man is as rich as old Sir Peter, as rich and as anxious to spend his money, he will have no difficulty in finding boxes at an even higher price than two hundred guineas.

Leontine was dazzled, enchanted in one sense. All the miseries of her life had hitherto arisen from poverty, and so it seemed as if some fairy with a mysterious wand had come and suddenly turned all the leaden dullness of her mean surroundings into gold. She had an abundance of money at her command, for Leontine had too much true and simple good taste to allow of her rejoicing in rich toilettes, unsuitable for her years.

Thus a hundred and fifty pounds supplied the necessities of her trousseau, and another fifty paid for the making of her dresses; there remained five hundred pounds in hand. Four hundred she placed in her father's hands as a

gift. The Bayswater home became in the eyes of its inmates a blooming paradise. How happy the Melrose couple were. Clear was enabled to dress as a gentleman, and Leontine told him that Sir Peter had great interest with the Government and would soon be able to get him a handsome appointment.

In short, Leontine was so busy in providing for the happiness of those near and dear to her, so interested and amused in making her purchases under the auspices of Miss Eva Rodney, so excited at the prospect of the worldly honours about to be showered on her, and so fearful that she might not wear them gracefully, that she gave no thought to herself! Her inner soul, the craving of her heart for love, youth, and the hopes of youth, seemed crushed in her soul.

"What have I to do with it?" She asked herself the question suddenly one evening, when she had returned late from the opera with her affianced husband and Eva Rodney. They had been listening to an impassioned love story, sung in the fervid Italian of a young and lovely new prima donna. Sir Peter, uglier than Moloch, as Eva acknowledged to herself unwillingly, had accompanied the young ladies to the drawing-room, where a fire was glowing in the low grate, and coffee with wine and cakes and biscuits were prepared for them.

"It is a most enchanting love tale," said old Sir Peter, grinning hideously.

Leontine, his promised bride, sat at a little distance from her future lord on a wide, low, silken ottoman. She wore a simply made robe of pale blue silk, and a great shawl of costliest white lace, the last a present received from the bridegroom elect that very day, was thrown around her slender form. In her fair hair was only a knot of light blue satin and a pure white camellia.

"She looks like a bride in a book of beauty," said old Sir Peter.

Leontine looked up at him with great frightened eyes and recognised the fact that yonder ludicrous old man, with bald head and flat white face—yonder old man whose pale lips parted in a ghastly grin, and who looked so like a skull, was to be her love, her husband, her life!

"What have I to do with love?" she repeated—"love! I wish there were no such thing on the face of the earth. There is no such thing—there can be no such thing for me."

Eva's great dark eyes looked piercingly at Leontine, and Miss Rodney acknowledged to herself that the girl seemed horribly frightened whenever that old man looked at her.

"And he is decidedly the most horrible looking old man I ever saw in my life," said Eva to her own heart. "Still the girl loves nobody else. What a match he will be for her. Half the girls in Belgravia would give their ears for him. What misery would be in store for her if she lost her chance and had to earn her own bread once more while her parents starved. No, she has no right to be so scared every time he looks at her. Still, I wish he would not look at her so often, or in that way. Another cup of coffee, Sir Peter?" said Eva, with a pleasant though conventional smile.

Sir Peter leered.

"Will my love bird pour me out one?" he said, in a low tone intended only for Leontine's ear.

The bride elect arose and went to the table and poured out a cup with trembling hands. As she was putting in the sugar she heard a door open and the sound of a footstep which set her heart beating. She had not seen Athelstane Rodney for some days. He had been away in the country. Nobody knew exactly where; but she knew that now she was listening to his footstep, and she said to herself:

"What will he say? What will he do? Will he care? Why should he care? Will he despise me? And if he does, should that matter to me? It should not; it does not; it shall not!"

And then the handle of the door was turned

and Athelstane walked into the room, started when he saw Sir Peter, bowed, turned to Eva as for an explanation, then catching sight of Leontine in her almost bridal dress, he seemed to comprehend that something had happened, or was about to happen, which would annoy, distress, pain him. Eva arose.

"Sir Peter Lingham, that gentleman is my first cousin, Mr. Athelstane Rodney. Athelstane, I suppose as you have been away you have not heard that our young friend Leontine Melrose is to become Lady Lingham?"

Athelstane could not account for the dull, fierce pain that contracted his heart. Leontine, the girl in whose father's house he had lodged, for whom he had cared nothing because she was not his dream woman. What should he care for her marrying yonder old monster of ugliness.

"Only I fancied I thought in the deep of my heart that—that I was debt to her. Ah, selfish wretch, what right had I to wish to keep the meanest place in that pure young heart. No, but women are all alike—all of them fickle and false. She will be quite happy when she is all in a blaze of diamonds, and goes to court and becomes the beauty and the toast of the season."

Truly the usages of society compel men and women to become hollow and conventional. Athelstane bowed, smiled, offered his congratulations to Sir Peter and to Leontine, drank some coffee, and said that now the new American doctor, Sir Falk, gave great hopes that Horace would in time recover his faculties. Then Sir Robert, who had been watching by his favourite nephew's side, entered the room.

A few commonplace remarks were spoken by all present, and Sir Peter took his leave. Leontine was walking wearily along a corridor which led to her room when a door opened to the right and Athelstane Rodney stood suddenly before her. He was pale and his eyes were bright and fierce; he, like Leontine, carried a lamp; he put it down on a bracket in the wall.

"Leontine," he said, suddenly, "you don't love this man you are about to marry, do you?"

The suddenness of the question threw her off her guard. She had no time to prepare her answer.

"How can you ask me?" she sobbed. "You must know that it is to provide for those I love, to—"

"Stop," he interrupted, "don't deceive yourself. We all deceive ourselves now and then. You must know that pearls and precious stones, gold and carriages, all the pomps and gauds of this world have tempted you into this unholy marriage, but you will regret and repent. Oh, yes, some day you will find your heart, and you will say would that I were dead, for you will love, Leontine, and the man that you love will not be your husband!"

"It is false!" cried Leontine, in a choked voice, "false, false, if you only knew. No, I shall never, never love."

In those few words the girl betrayed her secret. Athelstane understood that her heart was given to him, and worse than that, he made the startling discovery that his heart was Leontine's; that his passion for Clemence had been more like a fever dream; that by some strange spell something undreamt of in our commonplace, everyday philosophy, he had given his heart, or what he had fancied was his heart, to Leontine, while all the while his true, inner soul had been devoted to Leontine—that same inner soul awoke in him now hungering and thirsting with the strength of a giant for the love of Leontine.

This was his truer, nobler, better self. He could almost have sworn that he possessed a dual identity, a baser, weaker self which had slavishly bowed at the feet of Clemence; a nobler and truer one which craved the love of Leontine; and he was bound and she was bound, each to another love. In the course of the next month Clemence was to become Mrs. Athelstane Rodney. In the course of the next month Leontine was to become Lady Lingham.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ATHELSTANE PUZZLED.

Something uncanny, something wrong;
Was it a ghost or a roadside post,
Or a ruffian with a rapier long?

OLD SONG.

AND yet honour bound those two who so loved each other and had discovered it too late. Henceforth their lives must be divided; their paths lay in opposite directions. He knew it and she knew it, and they looked at each other with eyes so hot that they must have scorched up any tears that might have sprang to them unawares.

Nevertheless they stood in the passage holding one another's hands and looking into one another's faces, and few were the words that passed between them, for each of them felt that words would be wasted now. It is true that Athelstane meant to have said a great deal to Leontine. He had meant to reproach her for having been willing to sell her youth and loveliness for greed; but then he remembered that he had given his heart and promised to devote his life to a woman of whom he knew nothing, save that she was of an unearthly beauty, with eyes as black as night and hair as yellow as gold.

About this woman, his promised bride, there still lurked the shadow of the darkest mystery. And yet he was her betrothed husband. She was his betrothed wife. Wild thoughts stirred at his heart, it was true, and at last wild words escaped his lips.

"Leontine, I love you more than my life. Do you love me? Will you fly with me? Shall we cast in our lots together to suffer and die if we may not live together?"

"I would say yes," Leontine answered, "but honour and truth cry out against it. I have accepted Sir Peter's gifts. My parents are now clothed and fed by his bounty. No, I must sacrifice my poor life to this Moloch of wealth. I must bow down to this golden image, for I have passed my word, and I am an honourable woman. Had you spoken before—ah! had you spoken before"—her voice rose with passionate earnestness—"I would have gone to the world's end with you hand in hand, barefoot, in rags. I would have begged my bread with you from door to door rather than have parted from you; but you were cold to me, your love was not mine, and now I have pledged my word, and henceforth, Mr. Rodney, we must meet only as strangers meet. You must not tell me this tale again, nor look at me with those eyes. Farewell!"

She broke away, rushed along the corridor, shut herself into her own room, and spent the night, not in idle weeping over a dead past, but in fervent prayers to heaven for strength to do her duty as the wife of Sir Peter Lingham.

And Athelstane knew now what a treasure he had lost in Leontine, a woman such as the preacher speaks of in divine writ, when he tells of the woman whose price is beyond rubies. A woman upon whose robe, pure and white as an angel's, no speck, no blemish could be found, and yet a woman full of passionate love, deep well springs of affection, and such true devotion as makes men wonder and weep for admiration and for pity.

"Ah, what a wife she will make, even to that most hideous, repulsive old creature, at sight of whom her soul sickens. I know it does, but she will never speak other than well of him. She will be his devoted servant. She will watch by his sick bed. Ah, if he were dead and I were free! He is an old man, and I have heard Sir Fulk say that he has an inward affection of the heart. He may die in two years, in four years, in ten years. I would wait for her twenty years, and in the course of nature old Sir Peter would depart, perhaps within that time, but I am also bound."

Athelstane Rodney lay wakeful and restless through the night. He saw that it was quite inevitable that Leontine should marry Sir Peter,

but he would wait for her to become a widow patiently enough if only he were not the husband of Clemence.

"And why should he be?" he asked himself. "There seemed no occasion for it if the terrible tale he had heard from his cousin Eva, and which his visit to Camberwell seemed to have corroborated, turned out to be true. If she were the widow of a man who had died in prison, why should he, Athelstane Rodney, be compelled to marry Miss Melrose?"

Athelstane had, indeed, beaten about the bush, had thrown out hints, had done all that was possible to induce Miss Melrose to make some kind of confession or admission, but her wit, or her innocence—which of these was it?—had utterly baffled him. When he talked of Camberwell she laughed, and said that she always confused those suburban districts one with another, especially if they began with the same initial letter.

"I never knew Camberwell from Clapham or Catford."

Whereupon Athelstane had told her of his following a lady into the house and asking to see her, and he added that he had heard a strange story from the lady principal. Some portions of this story he had related to Clemence, but she had only clapped her hands and laughed and declared that, in truth, Athelstane was the drollest person she had ever met with in her life, and her colour had not changed, her voice had not faltered.

Athelstane was thoroughly puzzled. He made up his mind as he lay awake that night for a bold stroke of policy. It was that he would ask Lord Melrose himself if he had ever heard the name of Dupuis, a Frenchman, who taught dancing.

"I will watch my lord's countenance," Athelstane said to himself. "I will watch his eyes, and I will see if his lips twitch or his colour changes, and if that happens I shall at least know something."

Then Athelstane composed himself to sleep.

Athelstane sat in the library at the large mansion in Park Lane. It was late. He had bidden Clemence good-night, and she believed that he was keeping watch by the side of his unhappy brother. In reality he sat in the library awaiting the return of Lord Melrose.

Clemence with her mother and sister had gone away all smiles and loveliness and white lace flounces and diamonds to a ball at the Austrian Embassy. She had held her rosy lips towards Athelstane, and he had kissed them, wondering within himself how it was that he could not thrill through all his pulses as he once had thrilled even at the sight of those divinely lovely lips.

Clemence was just as lovely, just as charming, and she loved him now, or seemed to love him, and yet the spell was broken, the charm was no longer potent.

"My love for Clemence was like a burning, devouring fire," he said to himself, musingly.

"My dear twin brother whom I had hated for her sake was smitten down by murderous hands, and all the love I had for Clemence turned into something like dislike when I found that she had only been fooling Horace, and had no love for him. It was as though someone had suddenly thrown a deluge of cold water on the fire of my love and extinguished it, and then, strange to say, Clemence, who had hitherto treated me with what I now think a detestable and heartless cruelty—Clemence kneels at my feet, tells me she loves me, and rekindles thus my love for her. For a time the fire burns fiercely, then I see Leontine again, and a new fire is kindled in my soul. At the same time I have grave—the gravest suspicions of my future bride. I hear a dreadful story of her, and I cannot prove it untrue, and—I am bound to make her my wife! Oh, if there were only some door of escape!"

Thus far had Athelstane proceeded in his self-communings when he heard a knock at the hall door. A minute after Lord Melrose entered

the room. He had just returned from the Lower House. There had been a fierce debate, and the member who had been shouting with his party looked fatigued and worried.

Lord Melrose, as we have said elsewhere, was a handsome man, with gentle manners, but he had come in anxious for coffee and quiet, and he was vexed at the sight of Athelstane, still he shook hands with him cordially.

"Anything amiss?" he asked, languidly.

"Yes and no," Athelstane said. "There may be much, or there may be nothing. It is about Clemence."

Athelstane saw Lord Melrose give a great start.

"That girl is—the deuce!" he said, testily. "She will never be tamed until she is married. Well, what has she been doing? Where is she?"

"Gone with Lady Melrose to a ball at the Austrian Ambassador's."

"Oh," said Lord Melrose, taking a seat as if relieved. "I am glad she is safe—out of the way, but tell me what has she been worrying you about?"

"It is not she; it is a report I have heard about Dupuis, her former dancing-master."

"Good heavens! the man was a thief; stole Finucan's watch; was sent to prison, and died in the hospital, poor wretch. I did not like Finucan for prosecuting him." Then added:

"Well, and what in the name of the fates and the marvels had the thievish dancing master to do with Clemence?"

There was such a look of genuine honest wonder on the nobleman's face that Athelstane felt sure that he no more suspected Clemence of a secret marriage, or even flirtation with the defunct Dupuis, than of being secretly married to the Emperor of Russia. Thus he had not the heart or the courage to tell him the story which Eva had repeated.

"I heard a tale," he said, "that made me uncomfortable. It was that Clemence had once been in love with Dupuis."

The earl burst into a hearty and most genuine laugh—a laugh which entirely convinced Athelstane that Lord Melrose had not the slightest belief in the improbable story which connected his eldest daughter's name with that of the wretched French dancing master.

"In love!" he echoed. "My dear Rodney, do not allow your love and jealousy to make your life a torment to you. Clemence has never been in love in her life, poor girl, unless indeed she is really in love with you now, which I heartily hope she is. Dismiss all such evil thoughts from your mind, I entreat you. And now what will you do? Have you supped? It is very late."

Athelstane made some hurried apologies to Lord Melrose and hastened out into the wintry streets. Meanwhile Lord Melrose sat late over the glowing fire, drinking his coffee and making notes in preparation for his next speech in the House.

It seemed that his lordship had banished all thoughts of his lovely daughter Clemence, her approaching wedding with Sir Robert's heir, and the foolish, gossiping story of her ever having been in love with that wretched French dancing master.

The beautiful timepiece on the marble shelf struck two, five minutes before the ring came at the door bell which announced the return of Lady Melrose and her daughters. The young girls passed chattering gaily in French, which they had been speaking that night, across the hall. Lord Melrose darted out of the library and beckoned to his wife. She at once entered the room and shut the door softly behind her.

"Well," said Lady Melrose, "what is it, Henry?"

"It is scandal about Clemence," my lord answered, testily. "That headstrong Rodney has been bothering me with a cock and a bull story about some Frenchman whom the world is kind enough to say your daughter Clemence was once in love with. Now how could that story have arisen?"

Lady Melrose was ghastly white, but she

turned away so that her lord could not read the agitation on her face.

"I don't know," she said. "All sorts of absurd stories get about. What a comfort it will be when she is really comfortably and happily married. Sir Robert, as you know, is about to settle two thousand a year upon Athelstane; she has three thousand; they will be rich; they love one another; they ought to be happy. Don't trouble your head about Athelstane. He is so much in love that he is almost insane upon every point connected even remotely with Clemence."

Then Lady Melrose wished her lord good-night, and hastened up the grand gilded staircase to her own dressing-room, where she rang for her maid. When she arrived Lady Melrose said:

"I am not well. Unbind my hair and make me a good cup of tea, and stir up the fire. I will put on my crimson silk dressing gown. Then go to the Doctor Finucan's door. You will, I think, find him studying—he always turns night into day—and ask him to come here that I may consult him."

"Will madame not take some of her cordial drops?" asked the maid, who was foreign.

"No, no, make haste with my hair, stir the fire, and send the doctor to me; he will know what is the cause of this strange sinking sensation," said Lady Melrose.

The maid obeyed her, and in less than ten minutes from that time the doctor entered the room. He was pale and haggard; he wore a long blue dressing-gown, loose and large as the robe of a lawyer or a priest, but he looked more like a necromancer than like a quiet and sensible English gentleman belonging to either of the learned professions. His one eye shone with an intense, almost fearful brightness; his hair was matted on his brow. He paused abruptly, and stood with arms folded across his chest when he was about half way across the room.

"Well, what is it now?" he asked.

"Shut the door, please," the lady answered, softly. "My maid is gone. We shall not be overheard. Don't look so strangely scared, Doctor Finucan?"

"What has happened, then?" the doctor asked.

He now came in front of the fire, took a seat without ceremony, and held out his hands towards the blaze.

"This has happened," Lady Melrose answered. "Athelstane Rodney has heard of Dupuis, and has spoken to-night of it to Lord Melrose."

The doctor laughed a very bitter laugh.

"It is a marvel how I have hidden and hushed up that story, but you see things of that sort are only hidden for a time. Now she ought to marry, and there is only one man in the whole world, Lady Melrose, fit to be her husband."

"Enough, Doctor Finucan!" Lady Melrose interrupted the doctor with a wave of her hand. "That is a forbidden subject."

The doctor grinned hideously.

"Now I want practical and sound advice. Tell me this: What am I to say if I am openly questioned about Dupuis?"

The doctor gnashed his teeth.

"Tell your questioners," he said, furiously, "to go to Hades!"

Lady Melrose flushed a bright pink all over her pale, proud face.

"You forget yourself strangely, Doctor Finucan," she said.

"Do I?" he answered, insolently. "Then we will see in a little while—you and I—where all this pride of your ladyship's will land us."

The doctor and the lady discussed for fully another hour, and then the poor tired man of science went back to his books and the lady retired to rest.

Leontine was within three days of her wedding. It had seemed of late that the weeks had made themselves wings wherewith to fly away. Only three days and then she would belong

—actually belong to the old man who was so generous and so gallant and so gentlemanly, but whom, nevertheless, she could not see without a shudder.

"I wish something would happen that I might escape him," she said. "If I could only die! Ah! death would be sweet now, but I am perhaps a coward to think of that; it is my bounden duty to become this man's wife; I must not shrink from my duty."

She was brushing out her long fair hair; it was past midnight; she was looking in the glass. Suddenly she saw—distinctly saw the door of a closet behind her, and which was reflected in the cheval glass, very slowly opening! Horror held her spell-bound. That corridor was rather lonely; the housekeeper slept there, but she was a stout old lady who slept so soundly there was no waking her. The door of Leontine's room was locked, and the lock was a difficult one to open if one were nervous, and meanwhile the door of the closet was opening slowly, and Leontine saw the fingers and thumb of a hand appear. With a wild shriek she turned and caught at the bell-rope; it came off in her hand; it had been cut. A mocking laugh came from the closet. Somebody or something in white rushed out, threw down the candles from a table to the floor, and the room was wrapt in gloom. Then Leontine rushed to the door shrieking wildly.

(To be Continued.)

THE FORCED MARRIAGE;

—OR—

JEW AND GENTILE.

CHAPTER XII.

"This is a terrible affair," Upton said, after moment's pause. "A very terrible affair, indeed."

Upton's presence and voice seemed to throw a strange spell upon the young Jewess, for as he spoke her manner changed; the icy chill of horror gave way to that nervous trembling which before possessed her, and under the influence of which she had fled before him like a frightened fawn.

He noted her agitation and continued:

"You were in your husband's room when this tragedy occurred, were you not? Tell me all you can concerning it."

Thus addressed the young girl repressed her own emotions as far as she was able. She commanded her quivering nerves, she braced herself to meet with steadiness Upton's hateful stare, and in as brief a manner as possible related the occurrence as she witnessed it. For some time after she ceased speaking her auditor continued gazing upon her with a fixedness which increased the nervousness of the already overwrought girl.

"What were you doing in your husband's apartments?" he at last asked in a harsh tone.

Rachael flushed indignantly:

"I do not concede your right to ask me that question. Nevertheless I will answer, that having mistaken my way after leaving you I entered Mr. Aveling's rooms without knowing that they were his."

"Do you say you mistook your way to your own part of the house?"

"I did."

"Humph!" returned Upton. "It is strange that you should have thought to find them by going up a flight of stairs when you must have known your rooms were upon the ground floor."

Rachael's face flushed more painfully than before. She possessed a fair degree of courage, but she had grown to so dread this man that she dared not confess that she was flying from him; that her fear of meeting him was so great that she had flown up the staircase as being

her only path of escape, and that sooner than face him she had burst into her husband's forbidden presence.

It would have been well for her if she had avowed this, but how can an inexperienced young girl calculate chances and consequences which never arose to her innocent mind? Upton, still noting every quiver of the down-cast eyelids, every tremble of the sensitive lips, every varying hue upon the softly rounded cheek, drew his own conclusions, and from the unbroken silence, following his last question, adduced evidence which he deemed incontrovertible.

Days passed, and still Edward Aveling lingered on the borderland of life. Many times each day the attentive physician called to see his patient, and often he wondered at the tenacious hold he had upon life, for such had been the nature of his wound that he had little hope of his rallying from it.

Upton and the housekeeper at first alternately watched beside the sick-bed, but at last the former dismissed his associate nurse, and took upon himself the charge of the invalid. Rachael Aveling's request had not been granted. She was sedulously excluded from the sick-room, notwithstanding her passionate entreaties to be allowed to take part in caring for her husband.

Since the morning of the tragedy she had experienced a strange unrest. Her life became unbearably lonely; she longed for greater freedom; her thoughts were distasteful and harrowing, for they ever turned upon that terrible scene, which she strove to banish from her mind.

She knew that her reason would give way beneath this strain if she did not seek some diversion. She therefore resolved to take more frequent and extended exercise, and for that purpose she broke away from the restraints which she had hitherto observed, and going beyond the limits of Ashurst spent many hours each day exploring the country roads in the vicinity of the estate.

Pluto, her dog, was her constant companion at these times. Yet her walks, delightful as she found them in most respects, were not altogether without an alloy of discomfort, for by some peculiar chance she always met Mark Upton on these excursions.

He seemed to be pursuing the same object as herself, namely, healthful exercise; but it was somewhat singular that however she might vary her rambles, no matter which route she chose, or however inclement the weather, she was sure to encounter him somewhere ere she had gone very far from Ashurst.

These meetings she first attributed to chance, but after a while she fancied they were intentional, and this belief grew stronger when upon several occasions, remaining indoors, she heard that Mr. Upton had omitted his usual exercise.

This constant, surreptitious surveillance at first nettled and annoyed the young girl; but at length she viewed the matter more philosophically. She could not control Mark Upton's movements. He had the right to walk when and where he pleased.

He usually forbore speaking to her when they met, and as long as he maintained a respectful attitude she would not forego the pleasure of her necessary daily walks. The bracing wintry air brought bloom to her cheeks, despite the depressing influences against which she battled.

The healthful bodily exercise developed her physical growth; free intercourse with that nature she loved so well expanded both heart and mind, so that often in the very exuberance of youthful exhilaration, finding herself perchance upon some eminence remote from human habitation, yet commanding a view of wide extent, she would give vent to her joyousness in a glad, free song, her voice soaring and ringing in utter abandon, eclipsing itself in sweetness, and unconsciously to the girl, acquiring new tone and power.

Then, after these wanderings, which, though solitary, were not lonely, she would return to her silent rooms, and, with increased zest, would apply herself to her books or music. She allowed herself no time to speculate upon the strange events which had transpired in the family.

Their secrets, she considered, were their own; situated as she was, she had no right to pry into them, and as long as she remained unnoticed in Ashurst she would not seek to identify herself in affairs which did not concern her.

Yet she could not altogether refrain from thinking of the strange woman who had come to her so unexpectedly that stormy night, and who had disappeared as mysteriously as she had come.

Did her coming have anything to do with Edward Aveling's suicide? Who and what was she? Why had she come, and where had she gone? She wearied herself with these thoughts, but as no results followed, she strove, at last, to banish them altogether and never think of them again.

In the meantime, Mark Upton's mind was also the battle-ground of various speculations. There were many things which he could understand, and many others which he laboured in vain to fathom.

As he watched beside the sick-bed of his cousin his mind was constantly revolving chances of various import, and these thoughts assumed different phases, as, day after day, the tide of life ebbed and flowed in Aveling's veins. A degree of consciousness had returned to the invalid, but his condition forbade any exciting intercourse.

Time and again the sick man, when no one was beside him, opened his eyes and looked about him with a half-conscious, questioning gaze, and at such times, when Mark Upton leant forward to anticipate his wants, he would again wearily close his eyes, while a spasm of pain shot across his face.

Once or twice in the semi-delirium which followed his return to a semblance of life he had murmured to himself certain syllables which Upton bent low to hear, but they were faint and too indistinct to be intelligible. So, the attendant, sitting day after day at the bedside, thought, cogitated, planned.

With a nicety which such as he alone can understand, he watched and noted the chances of his cousin's life. With every dose of medicine which he administered these thoughts came quick and strong.

Prompted by these reflections he had dismissed the housekeeper from her attendance in the sick-room, and after that it happened that the retortative prescriptions were administered with a more sparing hand, and the doctor, at first pleased with the invalid's progress toward health, began to marvel that his medicines failed in their duty, for, instead of rallying, Aveling's improvement seemed suddenly and unaccountably arrested.

In truth, Mark Upton was playing a deep, a deadly game. His scheming brain had devised plans which, this time, he determined should not miscarry. These plans, it is unnecessary to state, referred to the possession of Ashurst and the immense revenues which were attached thereto, but in the very core of the man's black heart there were cherished other plans still more dark and treasonable.

These other and deeper plans related to the unprotected Jewess. Since the arrival of the young girl at Ashurst she had been an object of scrutiny and of speculation to the wary Upton. As the windows of his chamber commanded a view of the little terrace where she took her exercise, he had daily opportunity of watching her movements and forming those plans which, later, he determined to put into execution.

Thus, as he observed her day after day busy-ing herself with her flowers, moving about in the open air, as he heard her voice when she spoke to her faithful Pluto, or again, when he heard her singing or playing, he began to wonder

at the charms of voice, person, and movement which the girl developed.

He noticed her elasticity of step, the free, unconscious grace of every movement, the richness and purity of her voice, and, from the occasional glimpses he caught of her face, he saw that its harsher outlines were softened, that her complexion became clear and rosy, and that her eyes, always large and lustrous, grew more expressive and beautiful as time passed on.

The sweet country air, the free development of heart and mind, were working a change which Upton saw, but of which the girl herself was unconscious; and so there grew up in the man's heart a liking which would have filled her with horror had she been aware of it.

With this liking there also came a strong desire to keep husband and wife asunder as hitherto, for he wished to jealously guard the secret of her unconscious loveliness, lest Aveling should also become interested in his young wife and so frustrate his designs.

The wily Upton did not forget the suspicious circumstances attending his cousin's disaster. He treasured in his memory the fact that immediately after the report of the pistol in Aveling's room he had seen Rachael rush forth from the chamber with the murderous weapon in her hand, but he kept these remembrances to himself, biding his time when he might, or might not, turn them to his own advantage.

At first he had been entirely of opinion that Rachael's hand had done the well-nigh fatal deed, driven thereto by her husband's cruel neglect, in which, also, the strange woman's visit had some mysterious connection; but after a few days, Edward Aveling himself removed that suspicion, for, tossing uneasily and painfully upon his bed, he one day muttered broken sentences to himself which Upton, sitting alone beside him, bent his ear to catch. Doing which he presently heard the sick man mutter:

"I thought I should escape, but I failed. Who was it snatched the pistol from my hand? Give it back to me and I'll try another shot!"

Once and again had these and similar words fallen from the lips of Aveling, whose mind seemed ever wandering towards that last desperate moment of consciousness; and from these words, heard only by the alert Upton, a complete vindication of the innocent Rachael might have been adduced. But Mark Upton kept these murmurings to himself, and still patiently bided his time.

During these days, too, he kept a strict though nominally secret watch upon Rachael's movements. His own deep schemes made it most essential that the girl should not quit Ashurst.

So whenever she left the house upon her country rambles Upton was aware of the fact, and shortly thereafter would also go forth upon a seeming errand, and thus it happened that the two so frequently met.

About this time, too, it might have been observed by anyone astir throughout the night at Ashurst that Mark Upton did not keep his lonely vigils beside his cousin during all the hours intervening between sundown and dawn.

There were times when he stole from the house and went forth on errands which detained him one, two, and even three hours. These absences were planned at seemingly inopportune times, for it was always upon dark and stormy nights that they occurred; and when he returned, it was singular how closely he observed the patient whom the rest of the household supposed him to have been faithfully watching.

If anyone could have followed him upon any of these nightly missions, it would have been found that his steps were directed to a lonely cabin situated a mile or two from Ashurst, near a quarry which, in winter, was wholly deserted, but which, in summer, was used as a shelter for the men who worked the place.

In this spot, free from intrusion or scrutiny,

Upton was wont to meet another person who, from his appearance, seemed to have come from a greater distance than himself. The man, large brawny, of dark, sinister visage, was always dressed in such a manner as to conceal his features as much as possible. Yet in Upton's presence he threw aside both hat and muffler, and remained with him hour after hour concocting plans and discussing probabilities.

"How are affairs at the house yonder coming on?" the man asked one night about a fortnight after Aveling's attempt upon his life.

He nodded his head in the direction of Ashurst as he spoke, looking at his companion boldly and familiarly as though there need be no concealment between them.

"Bad, bad," replied Upton, his hypocritical mask laid aside. "In truth they could not well be worse."

"What's up?" demanded the other, brusquely. "The last time you sent for me to meet you here I thought everything was going along swimmingly, and that you were on the high road to prosperity and happiness."

Upton shrugged his shoulders.

"What was good six days ago is bad to-day," he returned. "It sometimes takes less than six days to turn certainties into uncertainties."

"Quit your riddling talk and speak so a fellow can understand you," said the man, impatiently. "When you and I talked matters over a week ago you were in high spirits. According to your story then Aveling's life wasn't worth a button; your claim upon his wealth was as clear as nature and law could make it; everything was going according to your wishes; indeed, you didn't think you could suggest any improvement, but now you are down in the mouth and everything seems turned upside down. What's the matter?"

"Matter enough!" retorted Upton, bringing his hand down upon the rough table beside which they sat. "Aveling grows stronger and rational every day, and his mutterings threaten to spoil everything."

"Who gives him his medicines now?" asked the man, insinuatingly.

"I do, of course. I hope you don't think I let anyone else meddle with him."

"Does the doctor still visit him?"

"Yes."

"What do you allow that for?"

"I'd like to know how I'm to put a stop to it. I can't send him about his business without exciting suspicion, and while he comes and goes every day my hands are tied, for he's a sharp-eyed fellow, and already he begins to wonder that his medicines don't have more effect."

The man laughed.

"How do you manage it?" he asked.

"Easy enough," returned Upton. "Half a dose or a quarter is enough at a time, and now and then I forget the stuff altogether, or I add something quieting, just to keep the fellow from muttering and whispering when others are by."

"Something quieting!" repeated the other. "That's not a bad idea, but it seems you don't make it strong enough to suit the case."

Upton frowned.

"You needn't think I'm up to any such business as that," he said, "I hope I'm old enough to know that it's best to let a man's stomach alone. If others want to arm such a witness against them they may, but I prefer other means."

"What, for instance?" demanded the other.

"That's just what I can't tell at present. There's a deuced lot of plans all hanging on to one another, and until I see my way clear through all of them my game is blocked in this matter of Aveling's."

"Ha! What other plans have you started?" the man asked. "Come, now, you and I must be fair and open with each other. We are playing for heavy stakes, and we can't afford to risk anything by keeping shady."

"Wait until I knew my own mind a little better," said Upton. "Next week—"

"Next week be confounded!" the man interrupted. "There's no time like the present, I tell you. Next week may be too late. You ought to have learned by this time that it's best to strike while the iron's hot."

"You're right there," muttered Upton, bitterly. "If I'd learned that lesson before, Ned Aveling would not now be master of Ashurst!"

"Then what are you stumbling about in such indecision for now? With your opportunities you're an idiot to wait and ponder and speculate when chances are slipping through your fingers. You want Aveling's money; you're determined to have it; you see a way to get it, so why the deuce don't you bestir yourself?"

"Because," Upton broke out angrily—"because I don't choose to go blindfold into a thing of this sort. I've no mind to put myself in the same fix as yourself. I shouldn't fancy sneaking about in disguise, lest I should be recognised and nabbed! What I do I shall do cautiously, so that my hand may not be seen in it. I would rather my little affair should seem to have the appearance of natural results, but if that can't be managed, we must cast about for something or somebody upon which to throw the blame. I won't have any suspicion falling upon my shoulders, I tell you that point blank!"

The man's face flushed angrily when Upton began this speech, for he did not relish being twitted with his own misdeeds; yet as his comrade proceeded he grew more placable until, when Upton finished, he said admiringly:

"Let you alone, Mark, for planning things! If I'd always had you at my elbow, I wouldn't need to dodge about at night as I do now; yet for that matter, I think I come here after dark at your express command."

Upton waved his hand evasively. "That's neither here nor there," he loftily replied. "I claim the privilege of doing as I please in this matter."

The other, a man of choleric temper, was strangely quiet under this haughty rejoinder.

"I don't deny that," he calmly answered. "Do just as you please, by all means, but let me say just here that if we are to be partners in this affair, I shall look out and keep my shoulders as free as your own. You sent for me and I came. We have had some free talks together, but if you want to go on in the matter alone, why, it's all the same to me. There are other parties bidding for my services. I shan't be idle," and rising from the old tool-chest upon which he had been seated the man turned up his collar, wound the muffler about his neck and prepared to leave.

"Don't make an idiot of yourself, Holmes," said Upton, now mentioning the name of his companion for the first time. "Sit down here and let's talk this matter over rationally. There's no use of our falling out like a couple of schoolboys."

"I don't see the need of my staying longer unless we can come to business," replied Holmes, dropping into his seat, nevertheless, and throwing back his coat and muffler. "I ought to be off, I tell you, else I shall miss the down train."

"Never mind the trains," answered Upton. "Open the budget of commissions I intrusted you with the last time you were here. In the first place, have you found out anything about Aveling's mysterious visitor of a fortnight ago? Who and what was she?"

"I don't know," was the emphatic rejoinder. "I followed the description you gave as closely as I could, but though I found innumerable old women I never got track of the one we want. If you had been on the watch to see which way she took when she left Ashurst that would have been a sure and easy clue."

"Well, but I didn't," answered Upton, restlessly. "I told you before that while I watched one place she must have escaped by another."

"You don't think she's still in the house, do you?"

"Impossible. The servants would have got wind of it somehow, and then I would surely have found it out. Besides, if she were there, the girl Rachael would know of it, and she couldn't put so innocent a face upon the matter as to deceive me."

"Ah, the girl Rachael!" repeated Holmes, a significant smile spreading over his face. "How fares it with the gentle damsel?"

Upton frowned and bit his lip nervously. Holmes continued:

"I think I must have caught a glimpse of the baggage as I came over here. I took an earlier train than usual to-day, so it was still daylight when I set out for this place, and just as I came to the brow of the hill below Ashurst, who should I come upon but a black-eyed, trim, high-stepping young jade, with a big dog at her side. She looked at me as if she had half a mind to turn back and clip it for home, but as I passed her with just a civil nod, she seemed to think better of it, though I noticed she kept the dog close at her side until I got out of sight."

"If you take my advice, you'll keep out of the way of all the Ashurst people," said Upton, sullenly. "It's not usual to meet strangers hereabouts at this season of the year, and there are always plenty of meddling gossips in the country to pry into other people's affairs."

"Oh, no harm's been done," returned Holmes. "I only got a glimpse of a mighty pretty girl. Jewess or not, you don't often see one so fresh and natty."

Again Upton frowned and bit his lip, and again his companion smiled significantly.

"Aveling's a dunce to neglect such a wife," the man went on. "Now, if I were in your place, Mark, I'd try to console her for the loss of such a husband. I'd—"

"Hold your tongue!" cried Upton, angrily, with a menacing gesture. "Your tongue needs shortening, if any man's ever did!"

"Beg pardon, Mark, if I've stepped on your toes in any way," said Holmes, with a shrewd side glance. "But how can a fellow know what to say and what not to say when he isn't confided in? I was only saying what I'd do, if I was in your place, when you flare up at me as if I had gripped you by the throat."

Upton looked at his watch.

"The time is almost up," he said, "and as yet we have agreed upon nothing. What do you say to the plan I spoke about last week?"

Thus interrogated the man laid aside the quizzical air he had worn for the last half hour, and assuming quite another, said:

"It won't work. Aveling started to reform, you know, and he seemed so deucedly in earnest about it that that scheme won't take."

"Confound his reform?" ejaculated Upton. "If I had suspected the fellow would have been up to that dodge, I'd have fixed him so he wouldn't have kept the notion long, but for once—"

"For once he slipped through your fingers, didn't he?" interrupted Holmes. "You managed that marriage cleverly, though. I suppose you were so intent upon that that you didn't keep your eye out for any side chances. It's a great pity old Mr. Aveling didn't live to be informed of his son's wedding. That would have been a 'Marriage in High Life,' which would certainly have brought affairs to a favourable crisis for you. By the way, did you know that Levy didn't sail that day?"

"What?" cried Upton, looking up in consternation.

"The money-lender didn't sail the day you thought he did," repeated Holmes.

Upton's jaw dropped and for some seconds he sat gazing at his companion in amazement.

"He promised faithfully—"

"Faugh!" sneered Holmes. "What is such a man's promise worth?"

"It's worth as much as another kind of man's sometimes," retorted Upton.

Evidently the words contained a taunt, for Holmes suddenly became quiet.

"How did you find this out?" Upton demanded, after a few minutes' silence.

"Oh, I found it out," replied the other, evasively. "I have ways of making such discoveries that people usually don't dream of."

Mark Upton was silent for some moments. At length he looked quickly up.

"Holmes!"

"Well."

"Do you suppose it was Levy who came to Ashurst that stormy night?"

"Like enough," replied the other, with imperturbability.

"Like enough!" repeated the other, angrily.

"You take the matter coolly! Are you such a dolt as not to see that if this old woman was Levy in disguise we have another chance against us, for let me remind you the Israelite is a sharp one and we shall have the very demon to pay if he mixes himself up with what we contemplate!"

"Like enough," replied Holmes with the same exasperating calmness. "But then again, s'pose it wa'n't Levy in an old woman's clothes, what then?"

(To be Continued.)

THE REASON WHY.

"WOMEN grow old so much faster than men!" Every day, almost, somebody says this in our hearing.

We are not going to dispute it; perhaps they do. There are many reasons why they should, but we are not going over them at present. We have only one reason to present.

And it is this:

Women do not wear whiskers!

Whiskers cover a multitude of imperfections. A man of forty-five or fifty, without whiskers, always looks old enough to be the father of the man with whiskers, even though that man may be his twin brother.

Age grows itself around the corners of the mouth, in little wrinkles and pouches, and in the front part of the neck, which wizens up, and seems as if there were altogether too much skin for what it has to envelope.

Beard covers all this up. Nobody can tell what mysteries are hidden under a full beard. A man may not have any mouth at all. Nobody would discover it from the looks.

Women's faces lie open to view. When wrinkles come round their mouths they cannot hide them under beard and moustaches. When their necks get skinny they cannot call a "full set" to their aid, under the false plea that wearing all the beard is a preventive of throat complaints.

"How old poor Mrs. Jones looks!" say the critics—"full ten years older than her husband." Maybe she does; but strip off Mr. Jones' beard, and you would see a difference—a vast difference. "Poor Mrs. Jones" would not look so terribly ancient beside him, after all.

Yes, there is no doubt but that beard is a great institution for the male persuasion. We don't wonder they cherish it from the cradle to the grave. We don't wonder that the schoolboy begins to feel of his upper lip to see if there is anything growing there, before he gets out of the rule of decimal fractions.

No doubt he is looking forward to the time when he will be a man, and have wrinkles to cover up.

Let no member of the beard-wearing community fancy that women hanker after a beard! Not at all. They had rather the wrinkles would show, and the skinny neck be patent to all observers, in due season! For a woman with a beard is a monstrosity, and she feels herself so, and fortunes are made out of depilatories in consequence.

The standard of male and female beauty is different. A woman cannot be beautiful without a fair, unwrinkled skin, say the critics; but

we have seen many handsome men with skins quite the contrary.

Good looks are but skin deep, and it is no wonder that everybody seeks to keep this necessity to beauty in the normal condition of its youth. But it will pucker up, get wrinkled, and lose its rosiness, if women live long enough, and they may not call in the aid of beads to conceal it. So they must grow old faster than their husbands, and be reconciled to it; and be happy that one of them can look young to represent the family beauty.

She must be resigned to hear herself called "poor old Mrs. Jones" and to hear her husband spoken of as "young-looking, and about forty-five," when she is sixty, and he is two years older!

Women have one recompense, one advantage over the other sex in this matter of hair. They never have the barber's scrape, and they don't have to use whisker-dye, and tell people who see the marks of it on their thumb nails, "that they guess it is nitrate of silver that they were doctoring a wart with the other day!"

R. H.

UNVEILED GHOSTS.

"I AM sure none of you were ever so terrified by a ghost as I was," said my aunt. "It was a Mexican ghost, which perhaps accounts for its having been more wild and weird, and altogether electrifying, than anything ever met with in the old country. You know I went to Mexico when I was young, and I spent many of my early years in a lonely farmhouse in the backwoods."

"And without any servants, Aunt?"

"Quite true, dear. Servants would not stay in such an out-of-the-way place without higher wages than we could give them, and indeed, the 'helps' we tried were often more deserving the name of hinderers. But we were all young and strong, and we never had happier days than when we all kept house together, and did the work with our own hands. Capital training it was, though at first, of course, we made many mistakes, everything was so strange and new to us."

"It was soon after our arrival at this place that I met with a terrible fright. My sister and I shared the same room, and one night I was awakened by hearing her crying at my side."

"What is the matter, sis?"

"Oh, a toothache, a most dreadful toothache; and I have nothing to relieve it. If I could only get some brandy; a little burnt brandy would cure it in a moment."

"My dear," I said, jumping out of bed, "I will get you some directly. I know where it is—in the parlour cupboard, and I have got the key."

"But you have got no light."

"Oh, I can grope my way to the room, and then I can light my candle at the stove."

"No sooner said than done. I wrapped a shawl around me, went swiftly and quietly downstairs, felt my way through the dark and deserted room, and succeeded in lighting the candle at the stove. But no sooner did I hold up the lighted candle to make my way to the cupboard, than the most unearthly shriek rang through the room."

"At the same moment the light was suddenly extinguished. I was left in total darkness, and all was still and silent as before. Chilled with horror, and trembling in every limb, I groped my way back as best I could, and told my story to Eliza; but she was in such pain that it did not make the impression on her that I expected. I got but little sympathy."

"It must be the wind, or a wild cat, outside, that screamed," she said; "and as to the candle going out, that, of course, was sheer accident. Of course," she added, "we are not such idiots as to believe in ghosts."

"This rather put me on my mettle; and moved, beside, by her moans of intense pain, I at

last braced myself up to a second attempt. I went with great determination, resolved that nothing should now hinder me from bringing the remedy to my sister. Proceeding downstairs again, all went well till I turned from the stove with the lighted candle in my hand. Instantly the same yell resounded in my ears, while something, I could not tell what, swept past me, and dashed out the light."

"How I reached my room I never knew, but I crawled into bed more dead than alive; and, as soon as I could speak, I told Eliza that no matter what happened, nothing would induce me to make the venture again."

"Morning came at last, and with it the solution of the mystery. My brothers had come home late, bringing with them a screech-owl, which they put in the parlour for safety till the morning. The light, of course, disturbed it, and it had flown against the candle and extinguished it, while uttering its peculiar and singularly hideous cry. My terror at the midnight ghost was a joke at my expense for long after."

"I think you were brave to go into the room a second time, Aunt."

"Well, I think I was, I must admit. But I would have braved almost anything for Eliza, and I was a strong, courageous girl, who hardly knew what fear was. Still, I can assure you that even to this day, when I recall the scene, I seem still to feel the thrill of terror that shook me at that unearthly shriek. Heard for the first time in the dead of night, and so close to my ear, it was truly startling and dreadful. It was a great relief when the mystery was so simply explained."

"But imagine if it had never been explained; if the owl had got in unperceived, and had escaped by the chimney or open window! How that ghostly shriek must have haunted me ever after! It would have been as frightful a ghost story as you ever heard. But see, at the touch of the little wand of truth the ghost vanishes, and only a poor screech-owl remains."

"Now let me tell the story of our family ghost," said Miss B—. "Such a useful, faithful, devoted spirit it was! An Irish ghost, but not a Banshee; more like a 'delicate Ariel' or household fairy. I only fear its race is extinct now, as well as that of the invaluable servants who used to identify themselves with the master's family. Our ghost was before my time; but often and often have I heard my grandmother talk about it, and tell what a mystery it was."

"The household was large and varied, consisting of the old couple, some grown-up ones, one of them married, an orphan niece, and two or three young children in the nursery. There were no railways in those days, and, when any of the family intended going to the county town, they had to be up at dawn of day, take a solitary breakfast, and set out on what was then a formidable expedition. Of course, the affair used to be discussed in the family the evening before, commissions given, and the time of starting fixed on."

"And now comes the strange part of my story. Whether the servants were up in good time or not, the fire was always lighted, the kettle boiling, and breakfast ready at the appointed time. The clothes which came from the wash were found carefully sorted over and apportioned to their respective owners; none could tell by whom. If a fire was required in the nursery, it was kept up by invisible hands. Nurse was a happy sleeper, but no matter; her deficiencies were supplied by the obliging and indefatigable ghost. Nurse used to find as bright a fire in the morning as she had left at night, the turf-basket replenished, and all as neat and orderly as hand could make it. To get out the breakfast things, my grandmother's keys must have been taken from her room, but by whom no one could tell."

"Leave the key-basket in my room," said a visitor the night before he left. "I am a light sleeper, and if the ghost comes to get my breakfast I shall know it."

"Toward daybreak he heard the keys tinkle, and instantly threw a dagger, which he had hidden under his pillow, to the spot whence the

sound proceeded. In the morning a dagger was found stuck into the door, but no clue to the mysterious visitor could be found."

"At last my grandmother determined that the mystery should be solved whatever it might be, and she prepared to sit up in her room all night, listening for the faintest sound. For a long time all was still, and my grandmother was beginning to fear that her long watch through the winter night was only wasting her strength in vain, when at last, somewhere in the small hours, she heard a slight thud on the stairs. Instantly seizing her candle, she rushed out just in time to see a slender figure in white carrying a basket of turf on its arm."

"The fall of a sod from the fuel basket was the sound she had heard. My grandmother was a brave woman, and swiftly as the white figure flitted on, swiftly did she follow after, up staircases and along passages, till just as it reached the nursery door, she overtook it, and discovered her niece walking in her sleep."

"It seems the poor girl was so anxious about the household arrangements that she used to rise in her sleep to accomplish all that she knew ought to be done. How her zeal nearly cost her her life through the foolish rashness of a young visitor I have already to tell you. She was never again permitted to sleep alone. My grandmother took her to her own bed, and clasped in her loving arms, the poor girl learned to forget her cares and take the full benefit of

Tired nature's sweet restorer, balmy sleep.

"Had not my grandmother possessed good sense, courage and resolution, the story might have had a very different ending." R. F. H.

BEFORE AND AFTER MARRIAGE.

BEFORE.

She waits and listens. Footsteps fall—
She knows they are not his,
She waits and listens for a sound
That sweetest music is.
He comes. And with a sudden thrill,
And heart-beat loud and clear,
She does not hear, she does not see—
She feels that he is near;
And coyly lifting to his face
Her eyes of heavenly blue,
She murmurs in love's softest tones,
"My darling, is it you?"

AFTER.

Again she listens. Footsteps reach
And footsteps pass her door.
She listens, but her needle flies
More swiftly than before.
She hears at length the tread that time
And cares are making slow,
And with a start that sends her chair
Hard rocking to and fro,
Springs to the landing, and with voice
More shrill than any lute's,
She screams, above the baluster,
"Augustus, wipe your boots!"

GEMS.

An ounce of generous praise will do more to make a man your friend than a pound of fault-finding.

It is a great deal easier to build castles in the air when you are young than it is to live in them when you are old.

If you regard yourself as the guardian of your own honour be careful that your position is not a sinecure.

The man who is in the habit of calling other people fools and asses is apt to head the list in their estimation.

The annual Smithfield Club Show was held at the Agricultural Hall from the 8th to the 12th inst.



[IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN.]

THISTLEDOWN.

It was a rare October day, and an Englishman knows that no other month in the year brings such perfect days as October; so soft and balmy is the air that it is a positive luxury to breathe.

Down in the orchard, under a huge apple-tree whose gnarled boughs drooped protectingly over her, and whose golden fruit almost kissed her cheek, sat a girl, idly plucking the grass, her eyes fixed dreamily on the gorgeous-hued mountain that loomed not many miles distant; but it was apparent that she saw little of the entrancing loveliness that lay in such profusion around her.

The hills and mountains rose bald and abrupt, range above range, each flaunting gay pennons of scarlet and gold, crimson and purple, the nearest range being perfectly dazzling to the eye. No painter, paint he never so cunningly, could hope to reproduce a scene like this in perfection, unless he had the rainbow at his command wherein to dip his brush.

But all this beauty and sweetness was wasted on the queenly girl dreaming in the deep shadow of the orchard; no, not wasted, for unconsciously to herself she felt its exalting influence.

Shall we describe her? No photographic artist had ever been able to do it perfectly, and we cannot hope to do it with pen and ink. She was no fairy-like sylph, this glowing beauty, but

rather tall than otherwise, and well-developed in form, with a clear brunette complexion, cheeks the colour of ripe cherries, eyes a deep, dark brown, with hair of the same hue that curled profusely on her broad, low forehead and neck: a full, firm mouth, none too small, and a rather short chin that showed much decision of character. If there was any fault in her features (and enraptured admirers were wont to declare her beauty was faultless) it was that her Grecian nose was rather small.

Her dazzling beauty seemed so in harmony with her surroundings, that she appeared as much a part of the landscape as the group of asters and golden-rod that bloomed by the orchard wall.

A big, golden apple, too heavy with its ripe sweetness to longer retain its hold on the bough, dropped with a dull thud in the grass at her side, and roused her from her dreamy wanderings. Her reverie seemed not altogether pleasant, for she gave a sigh as she said, half aloud:

"Somehow, things never do seem to come right in this life of ours—the right persons never have the right things. Such a twisted, tangled and knotted web we try to weave! who can rightly trace the pattern? I am tired of trying to untangle mine, anyway. Here is that rich Harry Horton perfectly infatuated with me, and determined that I shall marry him; but, try as I may—and I know I've tried pretty hard—I cannot get up the least bit of enthusiasm for him, while if only Kenneth Howard had but

a quarter of his riches, he and I would be the two happiest mortals alive.

"And papa is so anxious that I should marry Mr. Horton, and I have heard his virtues (and his wealth) harped upon till I am fairly tired out. If his virtues only were not such very negative ones. 'He is not dissipated, like so many young men in his position,' papa will say. 'And such a lovely place as his home is, in the suburbs of the town!' Clara will chime in. 'He is so devoted to you!' urges papa. 'He dresses so elegantly, and drives such a splendid turnout!' echoes Clara.

"But I could have borne all their importunity had not Kenneth turned traitor to his own cause, and insisted that I shall marry that commonplace fellow and his money. Dear Kenneth, he is so unselfish, and he is so afraid that I will sometime regret it if I refuse such a splendid offer. He does not suspect that his pale, sad face has more influence on my heart against his rivals' cause than all his generous praise can ever help it. If Horton had only kept away, or never been so foolish as to fall in love with me. Kenneth and I were so happy before he came. Or, if Kenneth had never told me he loved me, maybe I could the more easily persuade myself that I could marry Horton; but now—how could I?

"And yet I hate to be poor, and all my life has been a series of crushing down and putting away of the ungratified longings of my nature. It is all true, as Kenneth says, that I am better fitted to enjoy the luxurious things that wealth alone can bring, than to battle with poverty; and he is so afraid that I will not be happy without these things, and it must be so long before he can give them to me. Dear me, how can I know which of the tangled threads to pick out to make my web of life run smoothly? But I must decide, for I cannot ask Mr. Horton to wait longer for his answer. I believe I am like that thistledown that floats up and down, now here, now there, just as the faint breath of a zephyr wafts it."

She watched the phantom-like down, silently, with lips half parted, as if the ultimate course of that insignificant thistledown was to decide her own.

The faint breeze, sweet with the delicious aroma of the orchard, softly kissed her flushed cheek and toyed with the downy nothing that rose high above her head, danced hither and thither, and as the breeze died away into a dead calm, it floated slowly downward, and at last lay close in a bed of cool green moss. Her cheek flushed still a deeper hue, and a new light came into her dark eyes as she said:

"Who would have fancied that such a light-headed, coquetish thing as you would have chosen so lowly a bed? But the soft moss holds you so kindly and caressingly, as if it really loved you—you have chosen wisely after all, gay little thistledown."

She caught up her hat that lay on the grass beside her, and started in the direction of the house that stood embowered in shrubbery only a few yards away, yet quite hidden from view at the orchard. As she sauntered up the path her sister Clara was calling:

"Bertha! Bertha! Wherever have you hidden yourself, Bertha Ellerton?"

"Coming, sis!" she answered.

"At last! What a provoking creature you are, Bertha! Mr. Horton has been waiting for you in the parlour for half an hour, and I put on my very sweetest smiles, and entertained him in a sisterly manner; but I believe he is getting desperate, for he has fidgetted in his chair for the last fifteen minutes, and answered 'Oh, certainly!' to every proposition I have made, whether it was of the weather or last Sunday's sermon. So I called mamma to entertain him, and came to look you up."

"It was very good of you, I am sure, sis; but you have not over-estimated your powers of entertainment; I only wish you might go on entertaining him all your life, you seem so greatly interested in the stupid fellow—or his money!" said Bertha.

"Oh, it is his money," laughed Clara, "that

interests me most; but I think him really an agreeable young man, and I just wish he had made me the offer which you have treated so lightly; it wouldn't have taken me a month to make up my mind to say yes."

"And I am not going to say yes, after all. Clara—I can't. I don't love him now, and I would hate him if I were bound to him, and wish he and his money were in the bottom of the sea!"

"Oh, Bertha, you cannot be so foolish! What will papa say?"

"I am sorry for papa; it will be such a disappointment to him, for he is anxious that I should accept this offer; but he desires my happiness above all things else, and happy I never can be with a man I dislike, even though surrounded with luxury. You know, yourself, Clara, that if Mr. Horton were poor, you would never, any of you, have deemed him worthy of my hand; and how can I love such a man after having known Kenneth Howard? Kenneth is so talented, so grand, so good!" said Bertha, earnestly.

"A pretty pair of sentimentalists you and mamma are! I declare I am just out of patience with you both! One would suppose that mamma was old enough to get such nonsense out of her head, but she is just as silly as you are in this affair, and I do believe if it had not been for her foolish notions about love matches, you would have accepted Horton at first. I am glad I am not troubled with such sentimental nonsense; I have been poor all my life, and I am tired enough of it, and you may be sure I'll marry a rich man—if I can!" said Clara, energetically.

"What a mercenary sister I have, to be sure. But you may be in love yourself some day, and then we shall see whether you will follow your own worldly-wise advice or not," returned Bertha, as she went slowly up the garden walk, as if she wished to defer the coming interview as long as possible.

And while we leave our heroine to meet her unwelcome lover, we will give the reader a little insight into the history of our characters.

Bertha and Clara Ellerton were the daughters of a hardworking farmer, and not his only ones, for Katie, a brown-eyed maiden of twelve summers, the pet of the household and of the whole village, bade fair to rival her eldest sisters in beauty and grace as she grew to womanhood. Bertha we have already described, and Clara much resembled her, though smaller and less queenly than her elder sister; but there were those who declared Clara the more fascinating of the twain.

She, Clara, was eighteen, and had rural beaux in plenty; but her heart was as yet untouched, and as she had often declared her intention to marry a wealthy man or none, it was well for her to guard the portals of her heart too closely for aught but a golden key to unlock it.

Bertha was two years her senior, and had been besieged with admirers ever since she had put off the short dresses of her early teens and blossomed out a young lady. She had really fancied herself in love with Matt Rainsford before Kenneth Howard had come as perceptor of the village academy, where she was employed as teacher.

But from her first meeting with Kenneth Howard the fountains of her heart were stirred by a sensation so new, so exalted, that she knew that all she had felt for Matt Rainsford had been but a passing fancy.

If the master hand that had opened the door of her heart to this strong, new light had never come, she must ever have groped in the darkness. But as one who has always been blind can have little conception of the greatness of his deprivation, so she might have been comparatively happy in her darkness; but the light had come and illumined her whole being, and she saw now how dark and empty her whole life had been before.

And Kenneth? He felt his soul drawn out to this queenly girl who toiled so patiently at his side, day by day, at an uncongenial task, and longed unutterably to be able to take her

from a life of toil to one of ease and luxury. But he was poor; his only heritage was a grand intellectual power that had been cultivated, and with this he felt he might carve for himself a fortune in the flush of his strong youth.

He was proud, too, as well as poor, and he reasoned that until his ambition had compassed its aim, and fame, and something of fortune's favours had become his, that he would be a silent worshipper at the shrine of his love. He did not think of the injustice he was doing to her he loved by this proposed silence; he only thought proudly of the time, which he felt sure would come, when he could lay fame, position, wealth, at her feet for her acceptance.

His buoyant hopes had not yet been dimmed by disappointment, and he felt so strong to accomplish his plans that the years of waiting seemed but days to his rosy vision. But fate was stronger than his resolve, and Kenneth Howard avowed his passion just when he did not intend to (it is no concern of yours or mine, reader, how or why he did it); and when Bertha shyly confessed that it was fully reciprocated, he lived and walked on air for days. Yet he would accept no promise from her binding herself to him.

"There shall be no chance for after regrets," he said; "love that needs to be bound is no love. If you change not what need of a promise to make you mine? And if you should change, think you I would accept the casket when the jewel I prized alone was gone? In the years of waiting before us your love shall make easy the task of earning such a home as I wish my darling to share with me; but in the meantime you shall be free."

Her parents, pleased with the noble character of the young man, made no objection to the engagement that really was not an engagement, sharing the hopes of the young couple that a competence might soon be won by the ambitious youth; but with their experience of the disappointments of life, they knew that it would prove a longer waiting time than their young hearts counted on, yet they would not dampen their ardent hopes and aspirations.

"Time will do that soon enough," said Mrs. Ellerton.

And so the months had gone on in patient work and waiting, but the goal of their hopes seemed little nearer than at first.

With the sultry heats of July there came to Somerton young Harry Horton, whose father had died a year before and left him sole heir to his thousands, how many no one could say precisely, but that his fortune was large was certain. He did not, like many young men in like circumstances, set about the task of spending as soon as possible the fortune his father had gathered, but like a prudent young man that he was, spent with neither a lavish nor niggardly hand.

His character was unblemished, and though he was neither talented nor handsome, yet he was the popular lion of the summer fetes of the gay village of Somerton.

He met Bertha Ellerton first at a picnic, and thereafter embraced every opportunity to cultivate her acquaintance, and finally astonished her by offering himself and fortune for her acceptance before he had known her two months.

Bertha was somewhat dazzled by the brilliant offer, yet never really for a moment meant to accept it.

Mr. Ellerton was delighted, for he saw before his child of whom he was so proud the brilliant position already secured that she could hope to attain as the wife of Kenneth Howard only after years of waiting; and he trusted she would not show so little worldly wisdom as to refuse certainty right before her for the dim possibilities of the future that might never be realised.

She was not bound by any promise to Kenneth; it was her right, her duty, to accept, he reasoned. Could he have forgotten his own youth? Did he quite forget the time when he won the fair bride who had refused most eligible offers to accept—what? Only the true

heart that he offered her, for wealth was not his to give.

If Bertha had been surprised by Mr. Horton's unexpected declaration, she was still more astonished by the actions of Kenneth when she told him what had happened. His cheek blanched even to his lips.

"I knew it was too much happiness for me to claim you as my own," he said, sadly. "I might have known that so lovely a flower would never be left for so tardy a hand as mine must be to gather, and I ought not to have even hoped it. But I will thank Heaven for the blessedness that has been mine—ours for a few short months. I have tasted the nectar of the gods, and if henceforth only the dregs of former bliss is given to slake my thirst, I will not complain nor rail at fate. You have accepted, or will accept this offer, Bertha? I have no right to hold or keep you, and I will not."

"I am only bound to you by love; but I cannot marry him, for I do not love him," said Bertha, in astonishment.

"No, not just now, perhaps; but if I were to go away from you—for ever—you might learn to care for him. And think of the position that he can give you; you know your tastes are by nature luxurious, and you are well fitted to adorn such a home as he offers. I would give half the years of my life to be able to offer you to-day all that is in his power to make you possessor of. But years of toil and waiting must be mine before I can give you such a home as I wish you to enjoy. I would bear it so willingly for myself. But you—oh, Bertha, my darling, my beautiful one, what if you should tire of the work and the waiting and the self-denial? What if in the years to come you should look back with regret on this hour's decision? You are beautiful, my darling"—and his voice lost the sharp ring that his pain and his determination had given it, and grew soft and tender—"too beautiful to waste your youth in uncongenial work and waiting. You should be clad in queenly apparel, with all lovely things at your command, and you shall."

And here his voice grew sharp and hard again.

"And you?" said Bertha, quietly.

She did not quite understand the love that, from its very intensity, was so unselfish as to sacrifice even itself for the best interest of the loved one, and it puzzled her that he could so readily give her up if he really loved her as she had thought. "And what will you do when you have given me up so easily to another suitor? What is your life to be?"

"So easily! Oh, Bertha, Bertha!"

His voice shook a little as he went on.

"I know I love you a thousand times better than this fellow, though I doubt not he loves you as well as he can love, for how can he help it? But because I can love you shall I bind you to a life of toil and self-denial, for a time, at least, when such rich possibilities are open just at your feet? I am not quite selfish enough for that. If no such opportunity had come to you it would have been different. Oh, if it had never come to you! I would have tried to have made up to you for lack of many things. As for me, it matters little; I shall have my books, and in some distant land will devote my life to the pursuit of knowledge, of science. I shall love no other woman; how could I, after loving you? Oh, Bertha! it is so hard and bitter, but it must be."

"But what if I say it must not be? What if I will not give you up?" asked Bertha.

"And what if I will be given up?" returned Kenneth.

"Then I will live and die an old maid, for I don't love Mr. Horton, and will never marry him," said Bertha, decidedly.

"You are too impulsive, Bertha; you have not thought the matter over as you ought before deciding. Promise me that you will wait one month before you refuse this offer; will you promise this for me?"

"I promise, since you ask it, but I hardly think time will alter my feelings," she answered.

"As for me, I must go away from here, and I will spend this vacation at home with my parents, and leave you to decide this momentous question unbiassed by my presence. Strive to forget all that we have been to each other, and to decide as you will wish you had when the years have borne away the ardour of youthful romance."

"Oh, Kenneth, Kenneth! Why could not you have been rich?" she sobbed.

"I know not!" he answered, bitterly; and, clasping her to his heart for one agonising moment, he left her.

He could trust himself no longer. He had controlled himself by a mighty effort, that his judgment might not be overcome by his selfish love, as he called it; but her tears had almost made him give way. It was well, he thought, that it was vacation time, for he felt what torture it would be for both to go on with their work while this crisis of their lives was upon them.

As for her, she probably would never resume the work of teaching. Over and over again, in the solitude of his own room, he repeated to himself Bertha's question. "Oh, Kenneth, why could you not have been rich?" He felt himself growing hard and bitter as he thought of Harry Horton with his inherited wealth and position, that he had never laboured a day to obtain, of his beautiful home and of the queenly girl who should soon be its mistress—for he had fully settled it in his own mind that Bertha would finally accept the offer—and then of the lonely life he had marked out for himself, and groaned aloud.

"To him that hath shall be given, and he that hath not it shall be taken away even that he hath." I never quite understood that before; but it is not right; there is no justice in it, that he who has never toiled should receive the reward, and he who has laboured go empty-handed—ay, empty-hearted! If my father had been more worldly-wise, and continued the practice of the law, instead of relinquishing it to enter the ministry, he might have won wealth and fame long ago, and I might now be happy in ease and luxury with the one woman the world holds for me," he soliloquised, bitterly.

Just now he did not count his inheritance of a noble, unselfish disposition and grand intellectual powers as of much worth; they would not bring in ready money at their market value, and money seemed to him the one thing needful. Such a mood could not last long with one of his powers of mind, but he did not throw it off at once.

It did not occur to him that his own pride had raised this barrier between him and his love. He felt that he was doing his duty, a hard, bitter thing, but none the less his duty; that he was acting unselfishly and for her future happiness. He did not think she would be happy quite yet; she loved him too well to give him up without a struggle, and his heart gave a leap at the thought that ought to have convinced him that he had not given up hope that she would, in spite of all his arguments, refuse the brilliant offer.

But it did not. He assured himself over and over that he had parted with hope and love, and that a life devoted to his books and the pursuit of science was all that he hoped for, and he must find peace in that.

He went away the next morning, and Bertha was left to fight the battle with her own heart as best she might. And what with her father and Kenneth's arguments, her sister's entreaties her lover's importunity, and the ungratified longing of her own heart for all the beautiful and devious things that wealth brings its possessor, she was half beside herself.

She had asked for a month to decide her fate, which Mr. Horton reluctantly granted; and now, when the month was ended, she was no nearer a decision than at first. It was not the love of wealth for its own sake that made it so hard to put away this tempting offer. It was social position, ease and the opportunity to gratify the taste for beauty that had been repressed by their limited income. Bertha could remember

years ago, when she was a child, when things had been different at the homestead, when a comparative competence had been enjoyed.

But a little unfortunate speculation on the part of her father, a little too much of unsuspecting friendship and lending his money to those who proved unworthy of his confidence, had brought disaster to the once happy home. And sometimes, when Bertha looked in her mother's pale, timid face, and saw the patient "making things do" which she would fain have had so different, she chided herself for hesitating. Surely she ought to do something for her family, and here was her opportunity; for Bertha never for an instant doubted that her own wealth should enrich them also.

Perhaps—who can say—that wealth might have won her had it not been for her mother's influence. Mrs. Ellerton had instilled into the minds of her daughters from their earliest womanhood, the sin of marrying for wealth, social position, or any other cause than love; and when this crisis came in her daughter's life she did not alter her teachings to suit the pleadings of self-interest, and a desire to see her child in a high position.

"If you can love Mr. Horton," she said, "I should be glad for you to marry him, for I am not indifferent to the advantages of wealth; but if you do not love him, never dare to profane the holy sacrament of marriage by false vows."

The day had come when Bertha had promised Mr. Horton her answer, and she stole away to the orchard that she might think it out undisturbed, and there we found her at the opening of our story.

She went to her room and bathed her hot cheeks and aching head, smoothed a little the refractory curls the wind had tossed, and went to the parlour for the dreaded interview. Mamma soon excused herself with the plea of domestic duties, and they were left alone.

There was an embarrassing silence for a few moments, and Bertha trembled.

"You know why I have come, Miss Ellerton—Bertha?—I surely may call you Bertha? You have not forgotten?" he questioned, eagerly, and his voice trembled perceptibly.

She felt that he really loved her, and it made her task seem harder.

"No," she answered, "I have not forgotten, Mr. Horton, but—but—" she hesitated, and a shadow came over his eager face; a premonition of what she was about to say. He had felt so sure of his acceptance; had been sought after by mamma and their daughters, why should he not think this girl might be had for the asking? She cleared her voice and began again. "Mr. Horton, I fully appreciate the honour you have done me by your offer, but I find I do not love you as I ought to love the man I marry, and I must decline the honour."

"And this is your final decision? Could you not be induced to reconsider? You say you do not love me, but you do not say I am wholly indifferent to you. Perhaps, if I were patient, you could learn to love me in time; I would be satisfied with little if I knew that no other possessed more of your love than I. May I hope for as much as that?" he asked.

Her cheek was suffused with blushes as she answered:

"I will always be your friend, but can promise no more; it can never be."

"Then the tale I have heard is true, that Mr. Howard is my rival?"

For a moment Bertha resented the question; but then she thought that her long delay in answering might give him some reason to suppose she was not indifferent to him, and she felt that the least she could do was to be frank, and she answered in the affirmative.

"And if it were not for him your answer might have been different?" he queried.

"Yes, and no. If I had never met him, perhaps—yes; if you mean that he has influenced me against you, no; for he has been the most generous rival man ever had," she answered.

"Then there is no hope that you will change," he said, sadly.

"I cannot bid you hope," she replied, gently. "But some other more worthy of you may."

"I know what you would say," he interrupted. "I know plenty of girls who would marry me for the asking, and thank their stars for their good luck; I have been flattered and caressed till I am disgusted. You are the only woman I want, and you alone are obdurate," he said, bitterly as he rose to depart.

"I am sorry," she said, "let us be friends; I wish it had been different."

"We may meet as friends after a time, perhaps, though I cannot bring myself to that quite yet; but I can only wish you a happier lot than mine. Good-bye!"

He wrung her hand and passed out. Her tender kindness had taken away some of the bitterness of her refusal.

As soon as he had gone she sought her room, and, locking the door, gave way to a passion of tears that relieved her overburdened heart. She had not known how hard till the decision was made and the answer given; then the long tension on her nerves gave way to a sweet sense of relief, which was still mingled with regret for the pangs she had unwittingly given a heart that she felt truly loved her.

When she went down to tea her father was moody and silent, her mother quiet and tender, which told her without words that Clara had made known her decision. The only unembarrassed one at the table was Katie, who wondered "what ailed them all, and what made Mr. Horton look so gloomy; she had met him when coming from a neighbour's, and he hardly spoke and never smiled at all."

Mrs. Ellerton gave the unsuspecting child a look that made her understand that she was on forbidden ground, though why or how she did not understand, and she, too, relapsed into silence.

Bertha was glad to escape from the table as soon as decorum would permit, and ran down to her favourite seat in the orchard. The sun was just setting, and the whole mountain range in the east was ablaze in crimson and gold. She was all alive to the beauty of the scene, and said, almost unconsciously:

"I wonder why the poet said—

Sweet fields beyond the swelling flood
Stand clothed in living green.

He could never have seen our forests in their October gala robes; what can there be more lovely this side of the 'swelling flood' than a sunset like this?"

"Nothing," said a voice from beside her that thrilled her heart.

They had often watched the sunset together from this very seat, and she was not startled by this unexpected presence. She held out her hand with a glad welcome.

"I began to fear you never intended to see me again," she said, chidingly, for she knew he had been in Somerton two or three days and never called.

"I ought not to have come now, but I could not resist the desire to see you once more, to look in your soft eyes and say good-bye."

"And why will you persist in saying good-bye?" she asked.

Something in her face made him understand her.

"You have never rejected him, Bertha?" he asked, eagerly.

"But I have. Did I not tell you I would?" she returned.

He caught her to his heart almost fiercely.

"Oh, Bertha—my Bertha now—I did not think you could be so brave! I did not think you would choose a life of waiting with me when so much was offered for your acceptance. Darling, I am not worthy such devotion. How can I ever make up to you what you have given up for me?" he asked, tenderly.

"By being the best, the noblest, most unselfish fellow in the world; just what you are, my Kenneth," she answered.

"And now I know that nought but death can part thee and me," he said, solemnly.

She pointed to the mossy bank, and there lay the thistledown, closely enfolded in the green heart of the moss.

"It was that giddy thistledown that helped me to decide wisely," she said.

The sun went down, the twilight deepened, and a great calm fell over the face of nature like the peace that had fallen on their hearts, like a benediction.

L. B. J.

FACETIÆ.

AGRICULTURAL IMPROVEMENTS.

LAND-STEWARD (to tenant-farmer): "Well, Giles, what are you going to sow in here?"

FARMER: "Ain't 'actly made up my mind, sir; but if we could put in a few stewards and land-agents—they seems to thrive best on the land now-a-days!"

—Punch.

THE LINE OF BEAUTY.

ATHLETIC: "Don't you bicycle?"

ÆSTHETIC: "Er—no. It develops the calves of the legs so! Makes 'em stick out, you know. So coarse! Positive deformity!"

—Punch.

HOME EULERS.

THE O'FINIGAN: "Bedad, sorr, we were pestered wid those rascally spies of government reporters at our meeting last night."

THE O'BREADY: "Rimints o' Tory barbarism, sorr. Be more careful, sorr; stand at the door, and don't let a man in unless he comes himself."

—Fun.

A FOREIGNER writes to inquire the nature of the skin disease to which English blood horses are subject; since he finds that their owners are constantly scratching them.

—Fun.

TO-MORROW AND TO-MORROW.

YOUNG ROVER: "My leave is up; I go to-morrow."

WANDERING-MINDED MAIDEN: "Where? To-morrow? Where is to-morrow? And how do you get there?"

—Fun.

Q. E. D.

WE'VE got a moot problem before us: Is "decorous" right, or "decorous"? For one will say this, and another say that. While a third will cry, "Bless me, why, what can it mat-Ter?"

But we conscientiously can't endorse that; For we claim to belong to a quorum Who speak, write, and act with decorum.

—Fun.

DUST HO!

It is stated that such a vast quantity of dust is collected on London Bridge and blown about by the wind that passengers are almost blinded by it. This explains our having met so many City men in a blind rage. Without wishing to urge the Civic authorities to go in for reckless expenditure, we think this is really a case for them to "come down with the dust."

—Fun.

A NEGATIVE DECISION.

WERE I to seek a man to take,

By photographic art,

My portrait, and I then did make

Due payment for the carte:

Though pretty plain, one may presume,

Are here the rights and wrongs,

In Law there seems a doubt to whom

The negative belongs.

These rapid times wherein we live

Give things such startling turns,

One should not be too positive

In negative concerns:

Yet on the point we would define,

"To whom belongs that phiz?"

Though possibly it isn't mine,

I'll swear it isn't his!

—Fun.

POLICE INTELLIGENCE.

THE Derby policeman who distinguished himself by taking an elephant to the police-station

will surely be rewarded. Promotion must follow such elephantine sagacity, for the capture was effected without resorting to brute force.

—Fun.

PROVERBS REEMPLEDIED.

"In for a penny in for a pound." The rate-payers' experiences of the London School Board.

"Evil communications corrupt good manners." Mr. Charles Reade's letters when vexed.

"Let well alone." The Government do not intend going to the country if they can help it.

"No noose is good noose." A condemned criminal's view of a reprieve.

"Out of sight—out of mind." The Claimant to wit.

"There's no fool like an old fool." Tracy Turnersall is more than seven.

"Everything comes if you wait for it." Sir Charles Whetham's Mayoralty is over now.

—Fun.

A DREAM OF CHILDHOOD.

METHOUGHT I was a boy once more,

And playing round the spot

Where stood our peaceful dwelling place,

An ivy-mantled cot.

All nature seem'd to smile upon

That well-remembered place,

And one dear form stood by the door,

A smile upon her face.

The same sweet smile was on her lips,

And beaming in her eye,

That ever cheer'd our fireside

When winter time drew nigh.

The same sweet voice, I heard it still,

Was calling me by name;

The music of that much-loved voice

Will ever charm the same.

I heard the merry laughter of

My brothers as they played,

Beneath the widely-spreading oak,

That casts a quiet shade

Around our once bright happy home.

My father, too, was there,

He'd fallen o'er his book to sleep

Within his easy chair.

The scene had changed, 'twas evening,

And tired with their play,

My brothers were all fast asleep

Among the new made hay.

And with my gentle sister,

I was wandering by the stream,

When, awakened by the morning sun,

I found 'twas but a dream. O. P.

STATISTICS.

CAPACITY FOR DRINKING.—The inhabitants of our little island are stated to have consumed 125 quarts of beer per head per year, taking the litre at its usual value, penny three-farthings a pint. Teetotallers may be interested to know that this "drunken nation" was beaten by Belgium in the matter of ten and a half pints per head per year. Germany drank 164 pints, a quantity we beg leave to doubt, looking at the bibulous habits of the Teutonic races: we cannot believe that Great Britain beat her to the tune of 86 pints per head. The United States only consume 68 pints; Austria, 59; France, 37; Holland, 61; Denmark, 104; Sweden, 40; Switzerland, 46; Norway, 65; Luxembourg, 37; while Russia is only credited with 3 litres or 5 pints per head.

THERE is only now and then an opportunity of displaying great courage, or even great wisdom; but every hour in the day offers a chance to show our good nature.

HOUSEHOLD TREASURES.

EGGS FOR INVALIDS.—Beat an egg until very light; add seasoning to the taste, then steam until thoroughly warmed through, but not hardened—this will take about two minutes. An egg prepared in this way will not distress even very sensitive stomachs.

VEAL FROM DINNER.—Cut in small thin slices, peel and chop, two medium sized onions, fry in a small piece of butter to a light brown, and then add a dessertspoonful of flour, then the gravy, if there was any left from dinner, add the meat to this gravy, and just heat through. Serve immediately.

FAST BLACK DYE.—Prepare by boiling for one hour in two pounds of chrome, one pound tartar and one quart muriate of tin. Remove and wash in two waters. Dye with twenty-five pounds of logwood and three pounds of fustic. Boil thirty minutes; lift and add one pint of vitriol. Return for ten minutes: then lift, wash and dry. If you wish this to be blue black omit the fustic. This is for fifty pounds of wool.

APPLE JELLY.—Peel, core and slice very thin the apples required. To every two pounds weight add a quart of water, and boil till it is reduced to one pint and a half, strain off, and add one pound of sugar to each two pounds of fruit; add a stick of cinnamon. Boil the whole until moderately thick; add a quarter of a pound of isinglass, in similar proportion. Strain it off repeatedly till it is quite clear, and then put it up in jars.

TO DYE FEATHERS GREEN.—Take one ounce oil of vitriol by measure; one drachm of the best indigo, in powder; mix them well together and let the mixture stand for a day or two. Put a spoonful of it in a quart of boiling water, to which add a sufficient quantity of turmeric, to give the desired shade of green. By increase or decrease of this ingredient, you can have light to dark green. Allow the feathers to simmer in the dye, till all are the required shade.

MISCELLANEOUS.

GIX SLING is the name of a Chinese student at Harvard, who is preparing himself for the Bar.

AN English tiger tamer named Rice died in Berlin on Friday morning of wounds received from a fierce female specimen of the animal, with which he has ventured for some time back to perform in public.

MR. ST. GEORGE LANE-FOX is said to have invented an electric candle which is, for all practical purposes, permanent. By its means the electric light can be applied at a cost less than one-fourth that of gas.

FRED. ARCHER is said to have had a bet of £2,000 to £100 that he rode 200 winners this year, but stopped short at 199. He really won 200 races, but one horse was disqualified.

THE following bit of dialogue, in the nature of a conundrum, was raised on the reading of a recent comedy-farce as a little too much: "What is the difference between me and St. Paul?" asked one man of another. "St. Paul was all things to all men, and you are nothing to nobody," was the reply.

AMONG the First Empire fashions there were many that seemed made to disfigure the men and women who adopted them, and among the ugliest was the Talleyrand cravat, which is now, it is said, to be restored to favour. It is an enormous folded band of white muslin, tied in a bow knot and simply hem-stitched on the ends, and the wearer looks as if she had clergyman's sore throat.

"WHY do guns burst?" asks a contemporary, and then devotes nearly a column to answering the question. Guns burst because powder is put into them. You might use a gun a hundred years and it wouldn't burst if you kept powder out of it.

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NOTICES TO CORRESPONDENTS.

S. E. P.—1. Your daughter is a minor. Until she reaches the age of twenty-one you are bound to keep and provide for her. 2. Try benzoline.

SKILIA.—Send for Messrs. Davis & Co.'s price list, 15, Blackman Street, Borough, sewing-machine makers, their name is a sufficient guarantee that you will get the full value for money. An additional advantage is that if credit is required nothing extra is charged, and the weekly payments are as low as 2s. 6d.

YOUNG WARWICK.—The bookbinder to whom you send the books will cleanse them for you if you ask him.

MARY CHARLOTTE.—We would advise you to have nothing whatever to do with the Paris or any other continental lottery tickets.

QUEENIE.—1. There is no remedy for the redness of the nose occasioned by the weather. It is caused by the thinness of the skin covering that prominent but useful member. 2. Fullers earth is perfectly harmless.

MEDICUS.—We can with the utmost reliance recommend to you the free use of Holloway's Pills, and in your friend's case his ointment. The pills have a most soothing effect on the internal organs, whilst the latter, used outwardly, is well known as a speedy and effective curative of most of the evils that flesh is heir to.

READER.—Between the years 1595 and 1730 it was the practice to put over the periodical publications of the day a design representing the four cardinal points of the compass, with the initial letters N. E. W. S. at the points to indicate that the papers contained intelligence from the four quarters of the globe. From this came the word "news," and afterwards newspaper.

MACRAT.—We are not aware of any book in existence containing the life of Sir Colin Campbell. We will institute further inquiries.

PHILIP.—Considering the way in which the young woman treated you, and the unlady-like remarks she afterwards made, you are quite right in declining to give her the opportunity to repeat the offence.

THATY W.—1. Queen Victoria is of the house of the Guelphs. 2. Cherubin is pronounced cher-u-bin; rumb-mark-rik-mark; Veritas vincit—pronounced as spelled—means "truth conquers;" myriametre—my-ri-am-e-tre; kilometre—ke-lom-e-tre or kil-o-m-e-tre; hectometre—hec-tom-e-tre or hec-to-m-e-tre. The same rule applies in pronouncing the other denominations.

VERITAS.—1. For New Year's calls a table is spread, as if for an ordinary reception or party, in the back-parlour or dining-room. 2. A servant opens the door without waiting for the sound of the bell. 3. The gentlemen leave their cards in the hall. They enter the drawing-room hat in hand, or they may leave it in the hall with overcoat and cane. If visits are made without a carriage this disposition of their outer garment is usually a necessary safeguard to health. Ladies in full costume require the atmosphere of their drawing-rooms to be kept at heights which are intolerable to visitors wearing heavy overcoats.

NELLIE.—We cannot publish the code of handkerchief and fan flirtation. The less young people know of such things the better it is for them.

H. S.—You can get the book by sending direct to the publisher.

THOMAS.—There are many occupations in which you can engage notwithstanding your defective hearing. We can hardly suggest a means of livelihood, as we do not know of what you are physically capable, or in what direction your tastes and inclinations tend. As you cannot always secure the employment you prefer, however, it is advisable to take the best that can be secured, and watch for opportunities to obtain what is more congenial as well as more remunerative.

MAX.—As the young lady rejects your proposal of marriage solely on the ground that you are in the tobacco business, which affords you a good living, you must necessarily choose between the two, and unless you can get into some business which pays you as well we do not see any way out of the dilemma.

BLOW HARD, twenty-one, blue eyes, medium height, fair, would like to correspond with a young lady with a view to matrimony.

LAURA, twenty-one, fair, of a loving disposition, would like to correspond with a gentleman between twenty-five and thirty.

STEEN CHASE, twenty-three, good-looking, fair, medium height, a signman in the Royal Navy, would like to correspond with a young lady with a view to matrimony.

P. C., twenty-six, of a loving disposition, would like to correspond with a middle-aged man (mechanic). A widower not objected to.

JACK, ROBERT, and LEONARD S., three seamen in the Royal Navy, wish to correspond with three young ladies with a view to matrimony. Jack is twenty-five, dark, medium height, and fond of children. Robert is twenty-two, light hair, blue eyes, medium height, of a loving disposition. Leonard is twenty-one, black hair and eyes, fond of music and dancing.

HARRIET and CONSTANCE, two friends, would like to correspond with two tradesmen. Harriet is eighteen, fair. Priscilla is twenty-one, dark, tall.

G. F. E., twenty, fair, brown eyes, of a loving disposition, would like to correspond with a young lady about nineteen.

WELL DONE and LISTEN TO ME, two friends, would like to correspond with two petty officers in the Royal Navy with a view to matrimony. Well Done is twenty-one, dark hair and eyes, loving, fond of home and children. Listen to Me is nineteen, tall, black hair, blue eyes, and of a loving disposition. Respondents must be between twenty-one and twenty-five.

MARIAN, brown hair, hazel eyes, fair, tall, thoroughly domesticated, would like to correspond with a respectable tradesman.

SAUCY ELLEN, eighteen, a domestic servant, would like to correspond with a young man about twenty-two. She is loving, fond of home and children.

COMETH A BLESSING DOWN.

Not to the man of money,
Not to the man of deeds,
Not to the man of cunning,
Not to the man of creeds;
Not to the man whose passion
Is for the world's renown,
Not in form of fashion,
Cometh the blessing down.

Not unto land's expansion,
Not to the miser's chest,
Not to the princely mansion,
Not to the blazoned crest;
Not to the sordid worldling,
Not to the knavish clown,
Not to the haughty tyrant,
Cometh a blessing down.

Not to the folly blinded,
Not to the steeped in shams,
Not to the carnal minded,
Not to unholy shame;
Not in neglect of duty,
Not in the monarch's crown,
Not at the smile of beauty,
Cometh a blessing down.

But to the one whose spirit
Yearns for the great and good;
Unto the one whose storehouse
Yielded the hungry food;
Unto the one who labours
Fearless of foe or frown;
Unto the kindly hearted
Cometh a blessing down.

H. H.

DUSTY JACKET JOE, GEORGE, THOMAS, REGINALD, and HAPPY DICK, five seamen in the Royal Navy, would like to correspond with five young ladies with a view to matrimony. Dusty Jacket Joe is twenty-six, dark, good-looking, fond of children, medium height. George is twenty-four, fair, fond of dancing, tall. Thomas is twenty-two, fair, good-looking, fond of dancing and music. Reginald is twenty-three, dark, tall, of a loving disposition. Happy Dick is twenty-one, curly hair, tall, fair, fond of children. Respondent must be between nineteen and twenty-four.

HELEN and EMILY, two friends, would like to correspond with two gentlemen about twenty-one with a view to matrimony. Helen is twenty, auburn hair, medium height, fond of home and children. Emily is eighteen, loving, fair.

ACTION LEFT and RIGHT TAKE GROUND, two seamen in the Royal Navy, would like to correspond with two young ladies residing in Plymouth. Action Left is twenty-two, dark hair, blue eyes, medium height, fond of music. Right Take Ground is twenty-three, loving, light hair, grey eyes, tall. Respondents must be about eighteen, fond of dancing.

LILY and JESSIE, two friends, wish to correspond with two gentlemen. Lily is twenty, dark hair and eyes, good-looking, medium height. Jessie is twenty, light brown hair, blue eyes, loving, fond of home and children. Respondents must be between twenty-two and twenty-five, dark, tall.

ROSAMOND and MAUDE, two friends, would like to correspond with two young men about twenty-one. Rosamond is eighteen, dark, tall. Maude is eighteen, fair, fond of home and children.

M. P. and C. G. E., two friends, wish to correspond with two young ladies. M. P. is twenty, loving, dark hair and eyes. C. G. E. is nineteen, dark, of a loving disposition, dark hair, blue eyes.

TINY, DORA, and LAURA, three friends, would like to correspond with three seamen in the Royal Navy. Tiny is twenty-three, loving. Dora is twenty, fond of home and music. Laura is eighteen, fond of dancing and music. Respondents must be from twenty-four to forty-four, good-tempered.

JONATHAN, twenty, a seaman in the Royal Navy, good-looking, would like to correspond with a young lady about nineteen.

HOOK POT and MESS SPONGE, two seamen in the Royal Navy, would like to correspond with two young ladies. Hook Pot is medium height, blue eyes, fair, of a loving disposition. Mess Sponge is fond of music, dark, medium height.

WHITE QUICK, ELEVATE REST, and CYPRUS DICK, three seamen in the Royal Navy, would like to correspond with three young ladies. White Quick is twenty-two, tall, handsome, fond of children. Elevate Rest is twenty-one, fond of dancing. Cyprus Dick is nineteen, fond of children.

TOP MAST and LOW MAST, two seamen in the Royal Navy, would like to correspond with two young ladies. Top Mast is twenty-one, good-looking, brown eyes, dark. Low Mast is twenty-two, auburn hair, hazel eyes, fair, fond of music.

COMMUNICATIONS RECEIVED:

JOE is responded to by—Annie, medium height, brown hair and eyes, good-tempered, loving, thoroughly domesticated.

HANDY HANDY by—E. H. D., twenty-one, grey eyes, fair.

FORGETFUL JOE by—L. M. H., twenty, dark.

LOVELY NELL by—E. T., twenty-one, dark hair, grey eyes, medium height.

SHAMIS by—Wild Flower, twenty-five, fond of home and children.

MARY by—James M., thirty, brown hair, grey eyes.

POLLIN by—Jem, twenty, good-looking, tall, fair.

PRIMROSE by—R. M., twenty-three, medium height, fair, fond of home and children.

RUN OUT by—E. J. F., twenty, tall, fair, and good-looking.

ETHEL V. by—Harry W., twenty, fair, good-looking.

MILLY by—Cecil M., twenty, fair, medium height, and good-looking.

ALICIA by—Martin C., twenty-four, tall, dark, rather handsome.

L. B. by—Miss O.; and by—Mahoney, forty-four, a widow.

VIOLET by—P. E. A., twenty-two, tall, dark, fond of home and music.

ANNIE by—Dusty.

GRACE by—Smiler.

MARY by—Jack, twenty-one, dark, loving.

EMILY by—Bill, twenty, fair, fond of music.

JAMES by—Constance, twenty-two, tall, fair, good-looking.

BLOSSOM by—Flying Haulyards, twenty-one, tall, dark, of a loving disposition.

ANNIE by—Flying Gay, twenty-two, medium height, fair, good-looking.

ALICE by—Charlie B.

WILLIAM by—Nelly, twenty-one, medium height, very dark.

HILDA by—Reuben, dark, hazel eyes, and of a loving disposition.

CECIL by—Fred, brown eyes, tall, dark.

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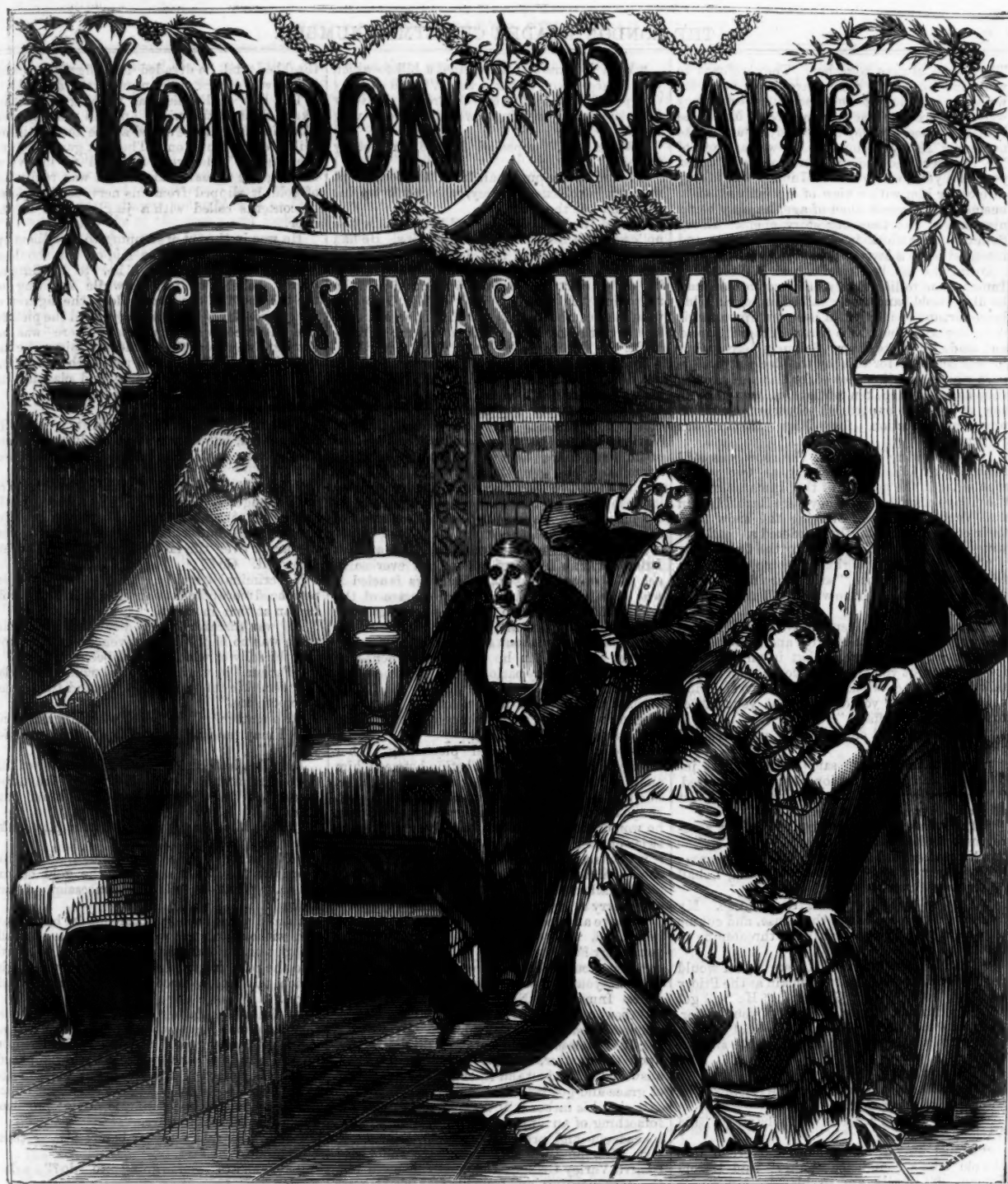
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The Phantom of Fairlie

CHAPTER I.

DISOWNED.

It was Christmas Eve. The snow was falling in thick blinding flakes, driven hither and thither by the cruel, sharp winter wind, eddying and scurrying, piling itself up in drifts, filling odd nooks and corners, respecting nobody, and covering hill and dale with a mantle of the

purest white. It was supposed that the storm was general throughout the country, but it was peculiarly violent in the neighbourhood of the little village of Ingledew, in Bedfordshire, and it seemed to take a special delight in dashing the snow against the time-honoured and weather-beaten walls of Fairlie Priory, an ancient dwelling owned and inhabited by a rich old gentleman of a miserly disposition named Miles Inman.

Mr. Inman had inherited the property from his father. He had two children, a son and a daughter. The mother of these children had died when they were quite young, and deprived of a mother's care and supervision, the boy Harold had run wild, being at the age of twenty as uncontrollable as an unbroken colt. Frequent and bitter were the quarrels between him

and his father. But his sister Angelina, who was fair and beautiful as the angels, and three years younger than he, presented an admirable contrast to her wayward brother.

Angelina Inman was amiability itself. Everyone loved her for her sterling good qualities, and the poor for many miles round had reason to bless her name. She was kind and charitable, but so unostentatious that she did good by stealth and blushed to find it fame. Harold Inman had a bad uncontrollable temper and was naturally vicious, being impatient of control. He had, unfortunately for himself, formed an intimacy with a young man a little older than himself, named Varley Gripper, the son of old Gripper the lawyer of Ingledew.

Varley Gripper was a good tutor in the school of vice; he found an apt pupil in Harold Inman.

They were always together. They refused to work and frequently disappeared from home for weeks at a time, no one knowing where they were. There was another inmate of Mr. Miles Inman's house, a young and steady youth whose name was Harry Selhurst. He was a ward of Mr. Inman's, and had an income of two hundred pounds a year, which Miles Inman was taking care of for him with a view of his embarking in business for himself when of age, he only being nineteen at the time our story opens. Harry Selhurst was a clerk in old Gripper's office and intended to be a lawyer.

Owing to the bad conduct of his son, Mr. Inman came to like Harry Selhurst better than he did Harold, and often talked of leaving his large fortune to be divided between him and his daughter Angelina. This threat enraged Harold and made him hate Harry Selhurst fiercely, but he was consoled for this by the decided preference which Angelina showed for him, and though they had never spoken of love, it was clear to the eye of a superficial observer that his unspoken affection for Miss Inman was returned.

It was growing dark and the snow was still falling with blinding intensity, as two young men entered the parlour of the Inman Arms in the village of Ingledew. They were Harold Inman and Varley Gripper. Shaking the snow from their coats and boots, they ordered a bottle of wine and warmed themselves by the fire.

"This is a nice night to come and get a fellow out of his house," said Harold. "I think your business would have waited till after Christmas, Varley."

"It will not wait," replied Gripper. "I am going up to London to-morrow and I must have the money you owe me. That is why I called for and brought you over here, because we cannot talk in your place without someone overhearing us, and I suppose you do not want your father to know all your affairs."

"He is disgusted enough with me already," remarked Harold.

"I can't help that," said Varley, whose influence over his companion seemed unlimited. "You know you owe me for money lent and lost at cards, over a hundred pounds."

"There was not much lent, only a few sovereigns," replied Harold, bitterly.

"No matter, I have your acknowledgments; if you do not pay me to-morrow morning I shall go to the old man."

"That's a nice thing for a friend to do. My father will turn me out of the house, and cut me off with a shilling as he is always threatening to do."

"That is your fault. If I were you, I would not allow Harry Selhurst to remain at the Priory an hour," said Varley Gripper. "He will get all the old man's money and marry your sister. That is what he is aiming at. What does it matter to him if you are turned into the street a beggar?"

Harold frowned darkly.

"He shall never have Angy," he rejoined, "I want you to marry her."

"She is indeed a prize worth having," said Varley.

"I must stay at home more and creep into the old man's confidence again," said Harold Inman. "I really am to blame. My father would like me if I would only meet him half way, and I know I could soon counteract Selhurst's influence."

"Of course," replied Varley, helping himself to wine and carelessly knocking the ash off his cigar. "I appreciate you as a friend, but there is no friendship in business and I must have this money to-morrow."

"But how am I to get it?"

"Rob the old man. He always keeps plenty in the house; he dare not prosecute you, because you are his son."

Harold buried his face in his hands and seemed to be completely overcome. His friend tapped him on the shoulder.

"Wake up," he cried. "I shall expect you here to-morrow at eleven."

"Eleven, be it," answered Harold, "since you have no mercy."

"Well you know, I discounted a bill to which you forged your father's name," said Varley Gripper. "and if I were to present that for payment at the Priory, it would not look very well."

"At eleven," repeated Harold, in a stony voice.

"All right, be punctual, for I hate to be kept waiting," exclaimed Varley, who drank up his wine and left the room.

Harold Inman was alone and he now saw the hollowness of his friend's protestations. He had merely made a tool of him, but the day of payment had come and he had to meet it. Buttoning up his coat, he called the waiter and paid the reckoning. It was one of Varley Gripper's peculiarities that he always did leave someone else to settle any little bill incurred for refreshment.

Going out into the fast falling snow, he could not help thinking what a much happier Christmas Eve he might have had, if he had thought more of his father and sister, and less of his vicious companions. Hitherto he had thought Varley Gripper his friend. Now he saw how much dependence there was to be placed on his friendship. He took the road to Fairlie Priory and was glad to find the snow suddenly cease its descent and the moon come out, shedding its silvery lustre over the white expanse of country.

At all times venerable and ghostly, the ancient Priory of Fairlie looked more than ever so in the pale moonlight. Harold always fancied it was haunted with the shadowy spectre of the monks of old, and from a boy he heard strange noises in the night, and had never crossed the lawn after dark without a cold shiver creeping all over him. When he entered the house he walked into the cosy parlour, where the members of his family were peacefully passing the Eve of Christmas, thinking how nearly a year had passed and forming perhance resolutions for the one which was soon to come.

Angelina Inman smiled pleasantly at her brother. Whatever might betide between him and his father, he had always a friend in her. She noticed that he was restless and abstracted. If spoken to by Mr. Inman or Harry Selhurst, he would not reply until he had been spoken to twice or even three times.

"You seem out of sorts to-night, Harold," she exclaimed; "to-morrow is Christmas Day and I shall want you to drive me to church. Papa and Harry are going to walk over."

"I have an appointment with Varley Gripper," he replied, "so you must get Selhurst to take you, Angy?"

"You would oblige me very much by giving up that young man's acquaintance," said Mr. Miles Inman. "Next year I shall adopt stringent measures with you, for your career of idleness must come to an end."

"It is useless to enter into any discussion, sir, upon the matter, as this is Christmas Eve," answered Harold, "and it ought to be a season of grace and goodwill."

Seeing his father still seemed anxious to say something of an unpleasant nature, he pleaded a headache and prudently retired, but not to rest. His mind was ill at ease. He would have to give Varley Gripper the money he owed him the next morning, and from his father's attitude it was easy to see that he could hope for nothing from him.

In the library was an iron bound box, which was said to be the treasure chest of the monks of old. Heavy and ponderous as the lock was, it was very old and rusty. Harold had often examined it and he was satisfied that a vigorous wrench with a chisel would break it. In this box Mr. Miles Inman always kept a considerable sum of money, as well as papers of value. Being as we have said of a miserly disposition, he liked to have money in the house, so that he could look at and handle it, for his gold was a toy to him.

Lighting a lamp on the table, Harold bent down on his knees and attacked the lock with a knife. The perspiration gathered in beads upon his forehead. He trembled like an aspen leaf. His body became hot and cold. His brain

throbbed and he dreaded the slightest sound, for he was committing an unworthy act.

The heir of Fairlie was robbing his father like a thief in the night and all the generous blood in his veins revolted at the act. Still his evil fate drove him on. The lock gave way and the bags of gold were revealed to his view. Testing one to make sure that it was really full of gold, it slipped from his nervous grasp and its contents rolled with a jingle-jangle on the floor.

He was in the act of stepping to pick them up, when a heavy hand was laid on his shoulder. Turning round abruptly, he, to his intense horror, beheld his father, while standing on the threshold of the library door, the figures of Angy and Harry Selhurst completed the picture. His disgrace was complete. There was no getting away from the shame and misery he had brought upon himself, and pale with terror and dismay he fell on his knees, and clasping his hands together exclaimed piteously:

"Father, forgive me!"

For some moments Mr. Inman struggled with his emotion, but a stern sense of duty overcame whatever inclination he had to err on the side of mercy.

"Never," he replied. "Rise, Harold. You are no longer my son. I have discovered you in the act of robbing me, and this Christmas Eve sees me cast you forth a beggar and an outcast to wander over the face of the earth. You are disowned. Go!"

No criminal trembling in the dock ever experienced more poignant anguish than did Harold Inman at that moment.

He was discarded and disowned. For him there was no hope, no forgiveness, and he now saw the folly of which he had been guilty.

"Father," he urged, "I owed money to Varley Gripper. He told me to rob you and threatened to expose me."

"No matter. I shall deal with him as I think fit. I may put him in the felon's dock. As for you, go."

Angelina had been a terrified spectator of this distressing scene. Rushing forward she threw herself at her father's feet and burst into tears.

"Spare him, for my sake. Oh! for pity's sake spare him," she cried.

"I cannot," replied Mr. Inman. "He has heard his fate. Let him keep the gold he has stolen. That is all the concession I can make."

Harold placed a bag of money in his pocket and without another word strode into the hall. He put on his hat and coat and walked forth into the cold frosty night under the moonlight which fell like a flood upon the snowy landscape.

He knew his father well enough to be sure that he was in earnest and that there was no chance of forgiveness. Seeking Varley Gripper, he told him in a few words what had happened, and as they stood in the street the bells of the church of Ingledew village began to chime merrily. Their sweet music only produced discord in Harold's heart.

"It will be many a year before I hear those bells again," he said.

"What are you going to do?" asked Varley.

"I shall go abroad. Here is your money," replied Harold, opening the bag, which was full of gold and notes.

He counted out the sum, received his acknowledgments and the forged bill, all of which he tore up, and shaking his false friend by the hand in a half-hearted manner, departed. There was but one thing to be done. He could not leave the village without wishing good-bye to a girl he loved. Miss Mary Chatteris was the daughter of the Rev. W. Chatteris, the clergyman of the parish, and they had long been attached to one another, though they had been somewhat estranged of late owing to his companionship with Varley.

He wended his way through the snow to the little ivy-covered village church, knowing that on Christmas Eve Mary would be there finishing the Christmas decorations, for she always

loved to make the sacred edifice gay at that glad season of the year. Time was when he had delighted to help her on such occasions, but latterly the church had seen very little of him and Mary Chatteris's heart ached sadly in consequence.

The church was lighted up, the organist was practising for the morrow and Mary was hanging up festoons of evergreens. Tears came to the eyes of the unhappy young man as he heard the soothing strain of the organ and looked at the girl he cared so much for.

"Ah! Harold," she cried, as she saw him, you have come to help me. This is kind of you."

He shook his head sadly.

"I have come to bid you farewell, Mary," he replied, "for I am going away to-night."

"What!" she ejaculated in surprise, "are you going to leave us at Christmas time?"

"Yes. My father has disowned me. I am a thief, Mary. He detected me taking his money and I am now a homeless wanderer. I shall go to America and try to shake off the curse that is upon me. Some day I may come back, and then if you hold out the hand of welcome to Harold Inman—"

He could say no more; his fortitude broke down and he turned away his face to hide the tears he could not keep out of his eyes.

"I am deeply grieved to hear this," said Mary. "Perhaps you have come to a wise determination. Think of me when you are far away, Harold, and I will watch over you in spirit. Yes, think of me when tempted to do evil. You will find me the same when you return."

He pressed her hand, and unable to bear any more, hurried from the church: the bells still made their festive music, the organ pealed, away in the distance stood the grim walls of Fairlie. That night saw him at Liverpool, and the next day he was steaming over the blue waves towards the broad Atlantic on his way to the far west.

CHAPTER II.

OUT WEST.

A YEAR has passed, and another Christmas Eve has come. The snow is falling as we saw it fall at Fairlie, but it descends in heavier and more blinding flakes; the wind blows in stormy gusts, and the drifts are thicker and bigger, for we are in the far west of America and the snow is falling on the boundless prairies of Nebraska.

Harold Inman is a stockman in the service of a farmer in Lincoln county, the fairest part of the Platte Valley. He has to ride many miles in all weathers to look after the cattle, for his master owns over five thousand head, which graze on the illimitable expanse of grass land. Not a tree is to be seen. It is an ocean of grass, but now it may be aptly compared to a sea of snow. The storm has come on suddenly, and the cattle should be driven to a pen staked out for them where food has been collected for the winter.

It is Harold's duty to do this, but he lingers by the warm stove reading some letters from England, for the mail has just come in and it brought two envelopes for him—one directed by his sister, the other by Varley Gripper, with both of whom he had kept up a correspondence. The farmer, his wife and three children are partaking of tea.

"Come, my lad," cried the farmer, "hurry up after the cattle. You've got twenty miles to ride in the snow, and if you're not smart you won't be back in time for your Christmas dinner. The wife's made a pudding, and I shot as fine a wild turkey as ever came to table."

Harold put the letter in his pocket, pulled his seal skin cap over his ears, buttoned his overcoat more closely, and going to the stables saddled and mounted a powerful black mare. He had been out at night in a snow storm before, and having a pretty clear idea of the country, was not afraid of losing himself, though men have often done that in the prairie

when there was broad daylight and no snow to blind and bewilder.

As he went along he thought of the contents of the letter, and his heart was stirred with thoughts of home. He had led a hard life in America. His money did not last long, and there was nothing to do in the cities of the east, so he went to Omaha on the Union Pacific Railroad, where he heard of the situation he afterwards obtained.

It was his hope that his father would forgive him. The hardships he had undergone had made him all the more anxious to be the owner of Fairlie. He valued now what he had lost. How happy he could be as master of Fairlie, the dear old priory for his home, and pretty Mary Chatteris as his wife.

It was an alluring picture, made all the more enchanting by the contrast which the cold, biting wind and the rolling, snow-covered prairie he was traversing presented. Angelina Inman said:

"I THINK papa would forgive you if you were here. He has not said so openly, but he is always talking of you. He knows that I correspond with you, dear Harold, and makes no objection. Papa has been in very bad health since you left, and he seems to think he will not live long. I should advise you to return. Now I come to an interesting piece of news. Harry Selhurst and I am engaged. I am sure you will be glad to hear that. He has gone over to New York for Mr. Gripper, senior, to collect evidence in a law case, and he told me to say that he should pay you a visit in Nebraska if he could spare the time. It would be odd if you were to eat your Christmas dinner together. You may expect him about that time if he comes at all."

Harold did not like Harry Selhurst very much as we know, and he felt that he cared little about his promised visit. It had always been his belief, carefully fostered by Varley Gripper, that Selhurst was trying to supplant him in his father's affections. The second letter was from Varley as we have said, and in it he referred to a matter which had occurred to Harold very often in his meditative moments.

"DEAR FRIEND," wrote Varley Gripper, "I write to put you on your guard against Selhurst. He is plotting to get your father's money and estate. I am sure of it. Mr. Inman sent for my father a week ago and asked him to draw up the abstract of a will, instructing him to make all his property over to your sister Angelina and Selhurst equally, leaving you with the proverbial shilling which if you don't look out is all you will get. Since then your father has made a mysterious visit to London, whether to execute this base will or not, we don't know, but he has not executed it in my father's presence. We think it looks very bad for you. Of course, there is plenty of money and you would not object to Angelina getting half. The galling point in the business is your being cut out and your portion given to Selhurst."

It was indeed galling, and Harold wished that Harry Selhurst was dead or had never been born. After riding for some distance the snow descended with such fury that he was alarmed. It was with difficulty that he could make any progress through the storm.

If he could only reach the corral or huge cattle pen into which he wished to drive the herd, he would be safe, for there was a hut there such as is used by ranchmen, and in it were stocked provisions and firewood. This hut was compactly built of stone and clods of turf, affording a secure protection against the weather. By the morning he expected the storm to cease, when he would be able to send in the cattle. Struggling on, he arrived at the corral, much to his delight, having been four hours making the journey.

Placing the horse under a wooden shed, he found his way into the hut, and lighting a candle, proceeded to build a fire in a small stove. This soon warmed him; a glass of spirits kept out the cold, and he spread out the

blankets for a bed, as it was useless to think of going for the cattle till dawn of day.

Taking a blanket, he went out to the shed to put it over the horse, and having done so his foot kicked against something in the snow, causing him to fall forwards. He put out his hands to feel what it was, and to his astonishment discovered that it was the body of a human being.

Whether it was alive or dead he could not tell, but he took it up in his arms and bore it to the hut, imagining that it was some unfortunate ranchman who had been caught in the storm and succumbed to its violence, or it might be some red Indian who had strayed from the teepees of his tribe, it being known that many of the Sioux had strayed from their reservations of late.

Placing the body on the floor of the hut, Harold shut the door to keep out the driving snow and the inclement blast, and then he held up the candle to examine the man. He uttered a cry and the candle almost dropped from his hand, as his eyes fell upon the features.

"Good heavens!" he exclaimed, "it is Harry Selhurst!"

Here was a strange meeting in the heart of Nebraska, on a snow-covered prairie far away from civilisation! No doubt Harry had travelled to Laramie, which was the nearest station on the Union Pacific line, and after obtaining directions had started on horseback, or it might be on foot, guided only by a pocket compass, and had been overtaken by the storm.

Harold Inman laughed harshly. Fate had thrown his enemy into his hands. The very man who, as Varley Gripper had warned him, was trying to steal his inheritance was in his power. Stooping down he put his hand on his heart and detected a feeble pulsation. He still lived.

It was in his power to carry his enemy into the snow again and leave him there to perish. That would put an effectual stop upon his inheriting any of his father's property. No eye but that of Heaven would witness the deed. Bad as Harold Inman was, he was not bad enough for that. The lithe and graceful form of Mary Chatteris seemed to rise up before him in the lonely, rudely built hut. Her silvery voice appeared to ring in his ears. He fancied he heard her say "Think of me," and it hurriedly appeared as if a black snake crawled into a hole with a sinister hiss.

It was his good angel who had banished the tempter. Trembling all over and white as a sheet, from the mental struggle he had gone through, Harold began to do his duty. He chafed the hands and feet of the half-frozen man and poured brandy down his throat, having the satisfaction of seeing him, in a short time, rally under this energetic treatment. At length he sighed deeply and opened his eyes.

"Where am I?" he asked.

"With a friend," was the reply.

"Harold Inman," cried Selhurst, "is it indeed you. My mind is a little bewildered. I ache all over. The blood is circulating again in my veins. Oh, the pain I suffer!"

"That will soon be over," said Harold.

"Where did you find me?"

"In the snow. I had to ride twenty miles after cattle to-night. We have a rough life of it here. Why were you rash enough to cross the prairie in the face of a storm?"

"They warned me not to at Laramie and the officers asked me to stop at the fort, but I had the route marked out on a map and I was very foolish."

"It was lucky for you I kicked against your body. You would have been dead by morning."

"I suppose so. The fact is I recollect nothing after I fell off my horse."

Harold administered some more brandy. The fire in the stove burnt brightly, and under the genial influence of the warmth Selhurst began to feel better, sitting up and looking himself again.

"This is Christmas Eve," he remarked. "You remember the last one."

"Shall I ever forget it," replied Harold, bitterly.

"Your father is, I think, sorry he turned you away so abruptly," continued Selhurst; "would you like to come back again?"

"Yes, under favourable auspices. No, if I am still an outcast."

"I owe my life to you this night, under Providence," exclaimed Selhurst, and if you will come back with me, I will do all in my power for you."

"I am making out tolerably well here, said Harold. "But it is a rough kind of existence."

"You want something better, and the comforts of home."

"Exactly."

"And a sight of pretty Mary Chatteris's bright eyes would not do you any harm."

Harold smiled.

"It is the dream of my life to marry that girl," he replied, "and to obtain my father's forgiveness. I will work at anything he pleases, and end the acquaintance of Varley Gripper altogether."

"It is a bargain then."

"It is. I will look after my cattle to-morrow, we will dine at the ranche, and I shall tell my employer to fill my place."

"Good," said Harry Selhurst. "It was really to get you to come back that I undertook a journey to America."

"Indeed?"

"Yes, Angy gave me no peace. She loves you and wants you at home. This law case of Gripper's turned up. He wanted evidence collected in New York. I jumped at the chance and came over."

Harold was touched at this proof of kindness.

"You shall not regret it," he exclaimed, "I will be a friend to you, if the necessity arises."

They spent the night in friendly conversation talking about home, and when day broke Harold went after his cattle. In a couple of hours he had them safely corralled, gave them food and water, and afterwards found that Selhurst's horse had had the sagacity to go under the shed, where he was feeding quietly by the side of the mare. They mounted and rode to the ranche, where they arrived in time for dinner. The farmer received Selhurst with true hospitality, and a very pleasant Christmas Day was passed.

When he heard, however, that Harold had determined to leave him and go back to his old country, he was deeply grieved. The determination was made and nothing could alter it. Harold and Selhurst made their way to Laramie and returned to England after a stormy voyage across the Atlantic, which is not the calmest of seas in the winter.

Selhurst deemed it best for Harold not to intrude himself abruptly on his father, and advised that he should stay at the Inman Arms for the night.

In the morning he would bring him word of his father's disposition and views regarding him. So Harold went to the village of Ingledew, saw the well-known walls of the Priory from a distance and retired to rest, expecting his friend early in the morning.

CHAPTER III.

THE CRIME.

THE landlord of the inn did not know Harold Inman, so altered was he during his absence, nor did he care to reveal himself.

The disgraceful circumstances under which he had left Fairlie were probably known and he wished to keep his identity secret. Instead of being a slim stripling, with a fair, white, hairless face, he was now bronzed and weather-beaten, having a beard, moustache, and whiskers. After being in bed an hour, he heard the clock strike eleven. Suddenly he thought of all that Varley Gripper had told him, and the idea came into his head that, after all, Selhurst might be a smooth-tongued deceiver.

"Why should I let him have the first inter-

view with my father," he said. "Perhaps he will only prejudice him more against me. I will go to the Priory myself."

Getting up he dressed himself. All was still in the inn, for the place was shut up, and the people of the house had gone to bed. In country villages folks retire early. Opening the window, he saw that there was a small lime tree close to it, into which he could easily drop, and so gain the street without disturbing anybody. Springing lightly into the tree he reached the ground and walked rapidly in the direction of Fairlie. When he reached the Priory, he could only see one light, and that came from the window of the library.

"My father is still up," he muttered.

The window of the library opened on the lawn in the Venetian style, and creeping up to them cautiously, Harold peeped in at a corner which the blind did not cover. Mr. Miles Inman was seated at the table looking at a photograph of his erring son. The expression of his face was severe and stern as usual. There did not seem any trace of yielding in it, for it was stolid and implacable. Seeing that the catch of the window was unfastened, Harold gave it a push, and as it opened, lifted up the blind and slipped in before his father. Mr. Inman looked up in amazement.

"Who are you, sir?" he demanded.

"Your son," replied Harold.

"I have no son. He was disowned a year ago. By what right do you intrude upon me?"

"By the right of natural affection," Harold said, confounded at such an unexpected reception.

"You will oblige me by retiring as you came, and never venture to show your face again on pain of being ejected by my servants."

Harold's pride was wounded. He was no longer a boy now. It was contrary to his inclination to be dismissed in this way. Had he come all the way from America to be driven from his father's door like a starving cur or a beggar? Advancing nearer to the table, he said:

"I shall not go until I have said that which I have travelled nearly five thousand miles to say. I am your son in spite of your unnatural denial. I have not committed an unpardonable sin. What are you going to do for me?"

"Nothing," replied Mr. Inman.

"Nothing!" repeated Harold, his temper rising every moment.

"Absolutely nothing; so you have had your journey in pursuit of a phantom."

"You are not a phantom," said Harold. "But by heaven, I have a good mind to send you to the land of shadows."

As soon as he had made this threat he regretted it; but words once uttered can never be recalled. Mr. Inman was deadly pale, but he did not evince any alarm at this speech.

"Will you go, sir," he said, "or must I lower myself and further degrade you by ringing for assistance?"

"I suppose," replied Harold, "that you have made your will in favour of that skulking hound who has undermined me in your affections?"

"To whom do you allude?"

"Harry Selhurst, the viper."

A faint smile played around the corners of Mr. Inman's mouth.

"I shall not gratify your curiosity," he answered, "for it makes little difference to you how my will is made, and it is none of your business to seek to know whether I have made any will at all."

"I insist upon knowing, for it makes all the difference in the world to me. If you die without a will all your property is mine."

"Ah! I see. You want my money."

"Father," exclaimed Harold, "I care about you. Indeed, I think a great deal more of you than you imagine, but—"

"Go away, sir," interrupted the irascible old man.

"I will not," replied Harold. "This is my house, and I have as much right in it as you have."

"We will soon put that to the test," cried Mr. Inman, rising from his chair.

"As soon as you like," Harold rejoined, folding his arms carelessly.

"You shall be put out of the house, sir."

"So it and everyone will cry 'Shame' upon you."

"That is my affair, and I will run the risk of incurring the odium with which you threaten me."

Mr. Inman stretched out his arm towards the bell-rope, but Harold, almost maddened at the coldness of the reception he had met with, rushed forward and interposed.

"You shall not do it," he cried, beside himself.

"It is infamous."

"I am master in my own house," was the reply.

Again his arm was stretched out towards the bell-rope. Harold pushed him violently backwards, and he fell heavily on the floor, striking his head against an iron knob of the ornamental fender.

"Great heaven!" he ejaculated.

The blood spurted from an ugly gash in his head, but after this exclamation he lay perfectly still and motionless. Horrified beyond expression, Harold bent down, and holding up the grey head, exclaimed:

"Father, are you hurt?"

There was no answer.

"Father," continued the miserable son, "it was an accident. I did not mean to do it. Speak to me."

No movement came from the pale, cold lips, which, alas! would never utter words more. Mr. Inman had ceased to exist. He was in feeble health, and an old man. The iron knob had broken his skull when he fell and penetrated the brain. Realising the awful fact, Harold started for the window like a hunted hare, fearful lest anyone might see him. He had unintentionally killed his father, and if detected the world would call him by the hateful name of parricide. No one did see him, and he shut the window as carefully as he had opened it.

Midnight struck. Rushing across the fields, he regained his room in the hotel as he had left it. Not a soul had seen him during his disastrous journey, and he breathed more freely when he thought how difficult it would be to bring home the crime to him. He passed the night in awful conjecture and direful apprehension. Never had he welcomed the dawn of day with such delight as he did on the morrow. Harry Selhurst would come soon and he would then know all. That his father was dead he did not doubt for an instant, but would he be accused of his murder? That was the momentous question.

CHAPTER IV.

THE PHANTOM.

VERY little sleep visited Harold's eyelids that night. For hours he laid awake, and when he did fall into a fitful and unrefreshing slumber he awoke ever and anon with a start and a cry. At about eight o'clock he arose and dressed himself. Scarcely had he finished than Harry Selhurst knocked at the door and entered the room, looking terribly scared.

"Oh, Harold," he exclaimed, "I have such terrible news for you! Be brave; try to bear it, old fellow."

"I will," gasped Harold, feeling that he had a part to act. "My sister; is she ill?"

"No, it is your father. Mr. Miles Inman is dead. We left him sitting in the library last night thinking over the intelligence of your return, which I gave him."

"Go on."

"He said he would give me an answer in the morning as to whether he would receive you or not, and he must have fallen down in a fit, for he had struck his head on the fender."

"My poor father!" exclaimed Harold.

"You had better come to the house. Angy is in hysterics and inconsolable. You are the master now."

"Am I? Suppose he has made a will."

"He talked about it, but I do not think he

has. Anyhow, Gripper will know whether there is a will or not. It is your house, and neither Angy nor I should ever think of turning you out," replied Selhurst.

Harold looked angrily at him. "You mean I might live a dependent on your bounty?" he exclaimed.

"Not that, certainly. You would always be a welcome guest, and we would start you in business."

"Thank you. Perhaps it will be the other way," said Harold. "However, it is not nice to be quarrelling over the spoils, almost before the breath is out of the old man's body."

"I agree with you there, but you began it."

"Did I," cried Harold, who began to grow bold and insolent as he saw no suspicion attached to him, and whose insolence increased when he heard nothing of the existence of a will.

"Indeed, you did," replied Selhurst.

"That's what you say. I can see you are jealous of me, as you always were. 'If it is my house, I am sure there will not be room for you and I in it.'"

Selhurst looked extremely pained.

"Your remarks are very uncalled for, and hurt me greatly," he replied. "But I make allowance for you on account of the distressing news you have just heard."

"Oh! I mean all I say independently of that."

"Very well, if that is so, Angy and I can get married and go away, for, thank goodness, I have a profession and money enough of my own to live upon and keep a wife. I wish to be no burden on you, though, if you are left out in the cold by your father, I can never forget how generously you saved my life in Nebraska, and you will ever have a claim on me."

Scarcely had he finished speaking than Varley Gripper came into the room. The news of Harold's arrival, and old Mr. Inman having a fatal fit in consequence of the event—so the gossip said—was already all over the village, as Selhurst had told everyone he met.

"How are you?" he exclaimed; "allow me to congratulate you on being master of Fairlie."

Harold shook his hand warmly, for he felt that Varley was just the kind of friend he wanted at such a juncture. He could not display any friendship towards Selhurst, as he wanted to get rid of him, and all his latent dislike came to the surface.

"You can go back to Fairlie," said Harold to Selhurst. "Tell my sister I will come as soon as possible."

Selhurst looked rather shocked at Harold displaying so little feeling, but he muttered something about seeing the undertaker and went away. Harold now devoted himself to his old friend, the sight of whom seemed to bring him back to old times.

"If there was any want of warmth in my reception," he exclaimed, "it was because that fellow was in the room. He always was my aversion. If I thought there was no will I would turn him out after the funeral."

"Father's got none," replied Varley Gripper, "and that is what I hastened to tell you. If there is one it will be found in the house. Can I be of any service to you in this trying moment? If so command me."

"Come with me to the house, help and advise me. I don't know how I stand yet. If the property is mine, I shall think I did a good thing in coming back, although it is very sad," said Harold.

Every time he thought of his possible good fortune his exultation was dashed by the reflection of the awful scene of the preceding night in the library as the clock struck twelve. He felt that if he were to live a hundred years and be as rich as Croesus he could never hear the hour of midnight strike without a tremor. Not a breath of suspicion was directed against him, and though the house was searched and every inquiry made, no will could be found.

The funeral took place regardless of expense, and was a grand affair, after which Harold was installed as master of Fairlie Priory. He invited Varley Gripper to stay with him, and though he was extremely kind to his sister he could not conceal his dislike to Selhurst.

Mary Chatteris received him with open arms, and when he asked her to be his wife she made no objection.

The day was fixed at six months after Mr. Miles Inman's death, and when Angelina heard of the happy event, she wished her own marriage with Harry Selhurst to take place at the same time. He promised to give her ten thousand pounds, but he told her openly that he would rather she married Varley Gripper. To this proposition she turned a deaf ear, and he did not press the matter because he saw it would be of no use. Angelina was deeply enamoured of Selhurst, and she would be his wife and no other's.

It was with great regret that Angelina remarked a change in her brother's manner, for since he had returned from America he drank a great deal. Sometimes he did not go to bed sober, and Varley Gripper encouraged him in his excuses. They played cards together for high stakes, Varley being generally the winner, and went off to London for days at a time. He never seemed to be able to spend a quiet evening at home, and was always craving after excitement.

The fact was, his mind was ill at ease, and the awful scene in the library when he pushed his father on the fender, was constantly before him. It was only in the daytime that he would enter the library, and when he did he quickly retreated. One night he engaged in a discussion with Selhurst about a quotation which the latter said was from Shakespeare, Harold averring that it was the offspring of Pope's polished wit.

"I tell you I'm right," said Harold, imperiously, "and I won't be contradicted in my own house."

"I only make an assertion, and the best way of verifying it is to go to the library and see," replied Selhurst.

"You are an insolent puppy," said Harold, who had been drinking heavily, "and I will thank you to get out of this as soon as possible." Selhurst bowed in a gentlemanly manner.

"You have no right to apply such an epithet to me," he exclaimed flushing, "but I have long seen your dislike for me. I will leave Fairlie to-morrow and you will not be troubled with my presence again."

"Don't be angry, Harry," said Angelina. "I am sure Harold did not mean it. He will apologise to-morrow."

"Not I."

Varley Gripper whispered in his ear:

"Don't give way. You ought have done this long ago."

"If Harry goes I shall leave also," exclaimed Angelina, "and I am both surprised and disgusted with you."

"If you go I will not give you a penny," retorted Harold.

"That will not grieve us," said Selhurst. "Your sister loves me for myself alone, and we shall not starve when we are married. I am independent of you."

"Lucky for you," sneered Harold.

"Yes, it is. I should be sorry to be dependent on your charity; but will you oblige me by coming into the library? I should like to settle the disputed point."

"Certainly. Come on," replied Harold.

He took up a lamp, and followed by Varley, Angelina and Selhurst, he led the way to the library. The key was in the door; he turned it, and threw it open, placing the lamp on the table.

It was not without an inward tremor that he did so; but his good friend Varley was by his side, and the generous wine he had consumed at dinner was circulating wildly in his veins. A clock in the passage began to chime the hour of midnight.

"Hark!" cried Varley. "It is twelve o'clock."

Selhurst was about to step towards a bookshelf when of a sudden a dim, shadowy form rose, as it were, from the floor near the fireplace. It walked into the middle of the room and grew more distinct, until everyone saw that it was Miles Inman.

Stretching forth its hand, it pointed to a corner of the library which was directly north-

east. Angelina clung to Selhurst and uttered a wild cry. The spectre stood immovable until the clock ceased striking, when it faded away into thin air as curiously as it had appeared.

The effect of this singular apparition upon Harold was most marked; his livid lips were parted, and his countenance assumed an expression of dire terror. As long as the phantom remained in the room his eyes were riveted upon it; but when it vanished he fell heavily to the floor, the blood gushing from his mouth and nostrils.

Varley took him in his arms and carried him into the drawing-room, where he placed him on a sofa. The others followed him, awe-stricken.

"What do you think of that?" asked Selhurst, addressing Varley.

"It is the most remarkable thing I ever heard of," was the reply. "We all saw it, and it was the phantom of Mr. Inman. If only one had witnessed the apparition there might have been a doubt about it; but now it is as well authenticated as the ghost of Lord Lyttleton."

"They say that spirits never rise unless they have something on their minds," remarked Selhurst.

"Or there has been foul play. What did the spectre mean by pointing to the north-east corner of the library?"

Selhurst shook his head. At this moment Harold recovered his senses and sprang up, waving his hand and shrieking wildly:

"Back! back! I did not do it. Who accuses me?"

"My dear fellow," said Varley, "what is the matter with you? Calm yourself. You are with friends."

"Ah! yes; thank you," replied Harold, recovering himself. "What have I been saying?"

"Nothing. You fell down and hurt yourself when the ghost vanished."

"Ha!—ha! Ghost!" said Harold, with a sepulchral laugh. "We must have been mistaken. Eh! weren't we? It was the wine we drank."

"There was no mistake about it."

"None? Then the house is haunted. Well, it is fitting that an old place like the Priory should have its ghost. Ah! old places do, I believe."

He tried to laugh again, but the attempt resulted only in a hollow rattle, which died away in his throat. Trembling like a leaf, Angelina retired to her room to pray for the repose of her father's spirit, and Selhurst quickly withdrew also. Harold and Varley applied themselves to the brandy bottle, endeavouring to keep up their spirits that way.

The phantom of Fairlie will give your house an unenviable reputation," said Varley.

"I won't live in it," replied Harold. "Suppose I make it a present to my sister. She and Selhurst are welcome to the ghost and the place too."

"You told him to go to-morrow, and if I know anything of that young gentleman's proud spirit I am sure that he will go, and equally sure that when he has departed in peace he will shake the dust off his feet and accept nothing from you. If you take my advice you will sell it."

"I'll go up to London," exclaimed Harold, shuddering. "It is too awful to be haunted by one's own father's ghost."

"Perhaps it may not appear again."

"Will you do me one favour?"

"A dozen if you wish it," answered Varley.

"Watch in the library to-morrow night and see if the phantom appears regularly at midnight?"

"I'll do it, my nerves are strong and I'll fire a pistol at it to make sure that there is no trick in it," Varley Gripper said.

"I shall be eternally indebted to you, for that will settle the question. If it appears again I'm off and the Priory will never see me again," replied Harold.

The test he proposed was by no means a bad one. Early the next day, Selhurst took away his effects from the Priory and engaged lodgings in the village, while Angelina, faithful to her

declaration, went to stay with Mary Chatteris, who gladly gave her an asylum, being much grieved at Harold's conduct.

The story of the phantom of Fairlie got mooted about, and people hinted under their breath that the old man had been murdered. They spoke darkly of the singular coincidence of his death taking place on the very same night that Harold Inman returned from abroad. Varley had been in the village and hearing these things reported them to Harold, who only laughed recklessly.

"Let them talk," he said. "It is all the good it will do them."

That night the two friends sat in the dining-room drinking until five minutes to twelve, when Varley rose and producing a pistol took a light and entered the library. Harold waited with blanched cheeks for the clock to strike.

"One!—two!—three!—fo—"

Suddenly there was a loud explosion. Bang! It was the discharge of Varley's pistol, and the echoes reverberated through the old house with a noise like thunder. Presently the last stroke of the clock died away, and Varley, very pale, returned to the dining-room.

"Well!" ejaculated Harold.

"It's a regular fixture and a real ghost," said Varley Gripper; "it came out of the floor at the same time and place, went through its performance of marching to the middle of the room and pointed to the north-east corner."

"Yes, what then?"

"I fired, and my bullet went clean through it, but the ghost never moved. It is a spirit, sure enough."

"That settles everything. Let us be off to London to-morrow. As long as it doesn't follow me about and confine itself to the library I don't care."

"I'll come willingly, but I can't keep pace with you," said Varley, "my father only gives me a small allowance."

"My purse shall be yours," replied Harold, who was in such a nervous state that he felt he could not be alone and did not mind paying for companionship.

"I'm agreeable," exclaimed Varley, "and I must say you are a free-hearted generous fellow. A few months in town will do us both good and you can come down in time to marry Miss Chatteris."

Harold soon made his arrangements to leave, he instructed Mr. Gripper senior to let the Priory, took farewell of his sister and Mary, to whom he promised to write often, and with Varley sought the gay metropolis.

CHAPTER V.

REMORSE.

WHEN we consider what had happened since Harold Inman's return from the great far West we cannot wonder at his perturbation of mind. He regarded himself as responsible for his father's death, though it was in reality a pure accident. He had only intended to stop him from ringing the bell to call a servant to eject him from the house; and the fatal fall of Miles Inman was not Harold's fault.

Still, it was through him that the old gentleman met his death, and the frequent appearance of the apparition, which had come to be called the "Phantom of Fairlie," began to prey upon his mind. He became, in fact, a haunted man.

It was difficult for him to sleep, and while he laid awake during the long, weary vigils of the night, he often fancied he saw his father standing at the foot of the bed, as he had seen him at Fairlie in the library.

Under the circumstances he was only easy when indulging in excitement, and he wandered about from place to place with Varley Gripper, gambling, smoking, drinking, and doing things which he knew were wrong, but which had a peculiar fascination for him.

Varley, as a matter of course, encouraged him in his dissipation, borrowed his money, and lived a life of gaiety at his expense. After visiting the principal cities of the Continent

they settled down at Paris, staying at the "Hotel Splendide." But even the attractions which Paris always presents to a man of unlimited wealth could not charm away the melancholy which devoured the very soul of Harold Inman.

When he was not thinking of the fearful end of his father his thoughts turned upon Mary Chatteris, to whom he was fondly attached, and who wrote to him constantly, begging him to lead a life worthy of the man she had promised to wed.

He knew he was not worthy of her, and felt that he could not settle down as her husband unless he told her all and laid bare his heart before her. If he did that he was afraid that she would turn from him in disgust, and bid him go elsewhere for a wife. In fact he had not courage enough to go back to Fairlie.

His temper became very morose. Varley Gripper did not spend a very easy time with his friend; but, as the bitter pill he had to swallow was gilded, he did not care so much, and put up with the disagreeable manner of his eccentric companion.

It was twelve o'clock in the day, and Harold was sitting at a table with Varley in the salle à manger of the "Hotel Splendide." Every delicacy of the season was placed before them; but Harold carelessly sipped a cup of chocolate and broke a roll in pieces.

"You don't eat, my dear boy," exclaimed Varley Gripper. "It's bad for a man when he gets off his feed."

"I really don't see why my abstinence from food should interest you," replied Harold.

"I take a paternal interest in you. Try some of the cutlets; they are immense."

"Eat them yourself," replied Harold, rudely. "They are paid for, or will be."

Varley was not easily upset, but this remark caused him to lay down his knife and fork.

"That observation, Inman," he said, "is an insult. I am your guest, and you pay the bills, but it is very bad form to talk in that way, and I must confess I do not like it."

"You are perfectly at liberty to do the other thing," exclaimed Harold.

"If you find my society disagreeable and wish to get rid of me why are you not man enough to tell me so? I can go. In fact, I think it is the best thing I can do. Good morning, Mr. Inman. Perhaps you will find the 'Phantom of Fairlie' a more congenial companion than I am."

Saying this Varley Gripper rose, and was about to leave the table. Harold suddenly became as white as a sheet, and stretching out his hand he pointed to a chair at the side.

"Look!" he cried, in a voice of terror. "There it is. Do you not see it?"

"See what?" asked Varley.

"My father's phantom!"

"I see nothing."

"Oh, heaven!" continued Harold, "am I to go through life with this thing ever at my side? Don't leave me, Varley. Forgive me for what I said. I am not myself at all."

Varley sat down on the chair which Harold had said contained his father's phantom.

"Now," he said, "you see that you are mistaken."

"It has moved to the chair you vacated," rejoined Harold. "I see him still. He looks threateningly at me. Oh, Varley, stay with me. I shall go mad if I am left alone."

"All right, old fellow," replied Varley Gripper, who had vindicated his outraged dignity and who, it may be stated, had never intended to leave his dear and generous friend.

"You will not desert me."

"No, I accept your apology. Try and banish this idea of the phantom. Your brain is over-excited; that is all. Drink less absinthe and brandy. Get out in the open air more. Let me see, you promised to go to Longchamps to-day, and shoot a pigeon match against the Comte de Courcy."

"Ah, yes, I remember it," exclaimed Harold. "Twenty-five birds, wasn't it, for five hundred francs aside?"

"That's the match?"

"I'll go with you, but with my nerves in this present condition, I don't think I shall be able to kill a bird."

"You are reckoned a good shot."

"My dear fellow," answered Harold, sadly, "I am not the man I used to be. The apparition of my father's spirit, or whatever you like to call it, is making me old before my time."

"Look here," said Varley, "I can't quite understand this. Do you mean to tell me seriously that you can see the old man now?"

"I do, I can see him in front of me, just as plainly as I can see you at this moment, and more than that, he comes to me in the night time and talks to me."

"What does he say?"

"Go back to Fairlie."

"Nothing more than that?"

"No, that's all. Go back to Fairlie, rings in my ears day and night," said Harold.

"It is the strangest case of a delusion I ever heard of in my life," remarked Varley, thoughtfully. "Do you know, old boy, that it would be the easiest thing in the world to put you in a lunatic asylum."

"I daresay it would. Perhaps you would like to do it, and be my keeper," replied Harold, distrustfully.

"Not I. Make your mind easy on that score. If I can't do you any good, you can bet your last shilling I won't do you any harm, because you have been too good to me, and ingratitude is one of the most hateful vices. I believe I have all the vices except that. Come! let us get out into the air, that will wake you up."

"Very well," exclaimed Harold, "I am at your service. I can perfectly understand that I am not the most cheerful companion in the world to-day."

"It would be rude to contradict you," said Varley Gripper.

They rose from the table, leaving the expensive and recherché breakfast almost untasted, and calling a fiacre, drove to Longchamps, where the shooting match was to take place, in the grounds of a fashionable hotel. Harold's estimate of his capabilities in the shooting line was correct. His hand shook and he did not bring down his birds as he would have done at any other time, for he was really an excellent shot.

His opponent, however, was unlucky and missed several times. When the score was called after half an hour's shooting, they had each killed twenty, and it was considered a very even match. The shooting continued and Harold tried to do his best, there were only five more birds to shoot at and he killed three to his opponent's two. If he could kill one more the match would be his.

He raised the gun to his shoulder and was about to fire when it dropped from his hand, the bird flew away unharmed, and Harold sank back in a chair exhibiting every symptom of terror.

"What on earth is the matter with you?" asked Varley. "For goodness' sake pull yourself together. I stood to win a pot of money on you."

"I can't help it," replied Harold in a low tone. "There it is again."

"What?"

"The Phantom of Fairlie."

"You must be deranged."

"Possibly I am. I see it everywhere. Just as I was going to fire, the spectre raised its hand. Take me away if you have any regard for me."

"But you will forfeit the stakes."

"No matter, this thing is becoming intolerable; take me away."

Varley made an excuse for his friend, whom he said was attacked by illness suddenly, and leaning on his arm, Harold went to the carriage, more dead than alive, and was driven back to the hotel. All that evening Harold remained very unwell.

"I wish I could do something for you," remarked Varley, in a sympathetic tone. "But as the poet says, 'Who can minister to a mind diseased?'"

"No one," replied Harold. "I must give up this life and go back to the Priory. The phantom will have it so. I am simply obeying some mysterious impulse which I cannot define. If this sort of thing goes on I shall become mad. No one could stand it."

"What will you do when you get back?"

"That is for the future to reveal," said Harold, gloomily.

The next day the friends started for England, and made their way to Fairlie Priory. Harold's mind was so oppressed with a weight of care, that he seemed perfectly indifferent as to what happened to him. For months he had been a haunted man, and his mental faculties were giving way under the strain.

CHAPTER VI.

FINDING THE WILL.

Very little was heard of Harold Inman by the good people of Ingledew for some months. Occasionally wild stories of his dissipation reached them. He was a frequenter of race-courses. His name was mixed up with those of Parisian actresses. He once broke a gaming bank and his recklessness appeared to know no bounds.

The Priory was let several times. No tenant, however, could be found to occupy it more than a few weeks and the reason given was that it was haunted. Everyone firmly believed in the Phantom of Fairlie, many had actually seen it, and when at last the old Priory was shut up, no one would come near it after dark.

The time for Harold's marriage came, but he wrote to Miss Chatteris from France, making some excuse and asked her to put it off until the end of the year. Half broken-hearted at his indifference and the strange stories about him that reached her from time to time, the poor girl was obliged to consent.

Angelina Inman was married to Selhurst as arranged, and Mary envied them their happiness, for theirs was indeed the union of two loving hearts. When Harold heard of their marriage he sent his sister a deed of gift of the Priory, saying that he should never live there again. She persuaded her husband to accept it, for she loved the old place, and very much against his will, he did as she requested.

Old Mr. Gripper had sold his business to Harry Selhurst, and the latter took up his residence at the Priory. By mutual consent the library was locked up, and if the phantom regularly appeared, they saw nothing of it. Yet they could not help thinking of it, and it was very painful to Angelina to think that her father's spirit could not rest.

The Reverend Mr. Chatteris was one of her oldest friends, and she frequently spoke to him on the subject. During one of her visits to Mary, the latter said:

"Papa and I were talking about the phantom, dear, last night, and he has a theory of his own."

"What is it?" asked Angelina. "Oh, if we could only lay the ghost I think I should be the happiest girl in the world. Harry is so good and loves me dearly."

"Ah!" sighed Mary, "you are indeed lucky. Look at me. I love, but I fear I am not beloved in return. Your brother has not written to me for a whole month."

"He will come to his senses soon, dearest," replied Angelina.

"I almost despair of it, but I will not weary you with my trouble. Forgive me, grief is selfish, you know."

Angelina rose and kissed her tenderly, with the affection of a sister.

"Now I will tell you what papa says," continued Mary. "He is a firm believer in spirits, and holds that they are at times allowed to revisit this earth, but always for some purpose."

"What object can my father's phantom have?"

"That is the question."

"Yes, and one rather difficult to answer. I do not see how Mr. Chatteris's theory will help us," remarked Angelina.

"My dear Mary, do not be so impatient. I have not finished yet," replied Mary. "Papa says that we ought to watch the ghost and see if we cannot find out what it is that troubles him. With your permission he will come to Fairlie and see if he cannot discover—"

"Will he not be afraid?"

"Oh, no," answered Mary, with a smile; "he has been engaged all his life in fighting the Evil One, and as a minister of the gospel he is not afraid of spirits; they can harm no one."

"Tell your father that I gladly give my consent to his plan, and he can pass as much time in the library as he likes. When will he come?"

"Probably to-night, and I may come with him, for I should like to see the phantom."

"You are braver than I, Mary," said Angelina.

It was duly arranged that the Rev. Mr. Chatteris should carry out any investigation he liked, though Angelina did not think much good would come of it. He arrived after dinner with Mary, and brought a carpenter who had his basket of tools with him. Selhurst laughed at this.

"You are quite practical, I see!" he exclaimed. "In the middle ages if they wanted to exorcise a ghost they brought bell, book and candle with them. Prayers and holy water also played a share in the ceremony, if I am not mistaken."

"Leave me alone to work out my theory," replied the parson.

"Oh, certainly."

"If I am unsuccessful, then you can laugh at me."

Mr. Chatteris entered the library a little before twelve with the carpenter, whose name was Jarvis, and they waited patiently until the clock struck, when the dread phantom again appeared.

"Unhappy spirit," exclaimed the clergyman, "why cannot you rest in the grave?"

The spirit pointed to the north-east corner of the library.

"In the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, I conjure you to tell me if you want to right some wrong?"

Three times the phantom of Mr. Miles Inman nodded his shadowy head and departed in the usual way.

"It's an awful thing, sir," said the carpenter, who was trembling violently.

Mr. Chatteris was little less impressed, but he did not lose his presence of mind.

"I begin to look more hopefully at it now," he replied, "for I am inclined to think that there is something hidden in this room."

"If there is I will soon find it," answered the carpenter.

"Take your hammer, Jarvis, and sound the floor and the walls; be especially careful in the north-east corner; begin with the floor."

Jarvis went down on his hands and knees and rapped all over the floor, which, however, was solid. He next tried the walls. There was a space in the corner between two shelves which when struck gave out a hollow sound.

"There is something back of this, sir," he remarked.

"Cut it open."

Jarvis proceeded to cut into the wall with a small hatchet, and, after some exertion, laid bare a little cupboard.

"Ha!" he cried, "a secret place! See, here is a spring; and look, here is a parchment document."

"Good!" said Mr. Chatteris, instantly rushing forward and taking possession of it. "How mysterious are the workings of the spirit-world."

He placed the document on the table; opened it and hastily glanced over it, finding that it was the last will and testament of Mr. Inman, drawn up by a London solicitor, and duly signed, sealed, and attested.

"The will!—the will!" he exclaimed.

Further inspection showed that the will gave everything the old man died possessed of to Angelina and Selhurst, to be equally divided

between them, not leaving anything but one shilling to "my son, Harold." Hurriedly taking the instrument into the drawing-room, Mr. Chatteris held it up in triumph.

"The ghost will appear no more!" he exclaimed. "I have discovered the mystery of the 'Phantom of Fairlie.' Mr. Inman had made a will. It was hidden in a corner of the library, and you two are his heirs. Look, and read for yourselves."

Angelina and Selhurst did so. The acquisition of wealth could not make them happier than they were; but none of us are ever averse to receiving money. Angelina kissed her husband, and said:

"Now, dearest, you are independent, and will not have to work any more."

"What of Harold?" asked Selhurst.

"We must telegraph to Paris, where he was when we last heard from him."

Suddenly there was a loud ringing at the bell and the sound of voices.

"A late arrival," remarked Mr. Chatteris.

The servants having gone to bed, Jarvis undertook to open the door, which he did, admitting Harold Inman and Varley Gripper, both of whom were partially intoxicated. Harold strode into the room and gazed at the assembled company.

"Good evening, ladies and gentlemen," he exclaimed. "I have been haunted by the phantom, which has given me no peace. It urges me every night to come here, and I dare not disobey it any longer."

He looked wretchedly ill, thin, pale, and actually emaciated, as if he had in vain sought to stifle the pangs of conscience in vicious dissipation.

"What to do, I know not," he continued, "unless I go abroad again. With my father's phantom over at my side my life is an unbearable burden. If Mary will release me from my engagement I will speak a few words in private to Mr. Chatteris, and leave England for ever."

"Leave me?" gasped Mary.

"I am unworthy of you," he replied.

"I shall be willing to hear what you have to say," exclaimed Mr. Chatteris; "but I think it only right to tell you that owing to the pertinacious appearance of the phantom I have this night made an examination of the library, my exertions being rewarded by finding in the north-east corner a will which gives all Mr. Inman's property to Mr. and Mrs. Selhurst."

Harold did not evince much mortification at this.

"I am glad of it," he said, "for the money has been nothing but a curse to me ever since I have had it."

Mary Chatteris had fallen back in an hysterical condition, and Angelina was vainly trying to comfort her. Varley Gripper shrugged his shoulders, and rose from the chair on which he had been sitting.

"Our acquaintance ends here," he said. "In future, Harold, we meet as strangers. I am too poor myself to be able to afford to know paupers, and have no money to lend."

Harold looked at him with surprise, not unmingled with disgust, a feeling which was shared by the whole party. This man had been living for months on the generosity of his friend, in the hour of adversity he basely abandoned him.

"One more blow," replied Harold. "It only shows me that life is a hollow sham, and friendship but a name."

Mary Chatteris rose, and throwing her arms round his neck wept bitterly.

"Say not so," she exclaimed. "I love you still, Harold, and with all your faults will cling to you. What matters it to me if you are reduced from affluence to penury?"

Selhurst also came forward nobly.

"As long as I have a penny," he added, "Harold can always count upon me. If a turn of fortune's wheel has given me the money he thought was his, he can yet have whatever he wants, and look upon me as simply a trustee."

Everyone was struck with admiration at this act of generosity. Finding that he was in the



[ALL'S WELL THAT ENDS WELL.]

very small minority of one, Varley Gripper slunk out of the room.

"Go, young man," said the Rev. Mr. Chatteris. "It would have been better for Harold if he had never known you, for I regard you as the cause of his downfall."

Gently disengaging himself from Mary's embrace, Harold approached the clergyman.

"Can I have one word with you in private, sir?" he asked.

"By all means."

"When you have heard all, I will be guided by your advice."

They quitted the room and walked into the hall, where in low tones and in a deeply penitent voice, interrupted by sobs, Harold confessed all that had occurred during the interview between himself and his father. Mr. Chatteris was greatly shocked and horrified, but on consideration he came to the conclusion that it was purely an accident and that the unfortunate young man was not criminal in intent.

"My friend," he said, "I will preserve in my breast what you have told me, and keep it as a secret entrusted to me in my capacity as a clergyman. Your father was a hard man and you did not act wilfully."

"Heaven only knows how I have suffered," replied Harold.

"He will pardon and comfort you, if you lay your troubles at His feet and are sincerely sorry."

"I am indeed, and if a life of purity in the future will atone for the guilt and folly of the past—"

"It will, it will," interrupted Mr. Chatteris, "I promise you that."

Harold recovered partially from his agitation.

"Now tell me, sir," he said, "shall I go abroad again and work out my expiation in the wild and awful solitude of the far West, or am I worthy to be the husband of your angelic daughter?"

"Far be it from me to condemn you," answered Mr. Chatteris. "Rather will I hold

out a helping hand, believing your reformation to be earnest. You shall have a twelvemonths' probation."

"Make it as long as you like, sir."

"That is sufficient. If at the expiration of that time, by embarking in some career and showing yourself to be a man in every sense of the word you prove yourself worthy of my daughter, you shall have her, and I think I am consulting her happiness as well as yours, for I know she loves you."

Harold seized the good man's hand, and raising it to his lips kissed it in token of gratitude.

"You have put new life into me," he said.

Mr. Chatteris impressed upon him that there was no necessity for saying one word to anyone as to his father's death.

"Let that be your secret and mine," he remarked; "if you stood your trial for manslaughter, no jury would convict you on your own evidence, and it would simply raise a painful scandal. It is a matter now between you and Heaven, which is ever merciful to the erring. Let heartfelt prayers be your consolation."

With bowed head, Harold Inman accepted his advice.

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Again it is Christmas Eve. The snow is falling softly and gently, there is no angry wind to drive it into people's faces, and the flakes rest on the ground like the frozen tears of angels, shed for the backslidings of the children of men.

The bells are ringing their chimes and the organ is pealing in the church at Ingledew in which Mary Chatteris and Harold Inman, Angelina and Selhurst are decorating the aisle and the altar as of old. There is a happy expression on Harold's face, and it is not to be wondered at, for he is to be married to Mary on the morrow.

He has become a farmer on an extensive scale, helped by Selhurst's capital, and there is

not a better or steadier young man in the whole country. The phantom of Fairlie has never been seen since that eventful night when Mr. Chatteris conquered the restless spirit. Varley Gripper is in prison for committing a forgery, and his father's grey hairs brought down with sorrow to the grave will not gladden his eye when he emerges from his servitude.

"Mary, my own, my darling one," whispers Harold, as he hands her a wreath of evergreens, "so you really love me?"

"Better than life itself, Harold?" she replied.

The tears come into his eyes as he presses her little white hand and he feels that there is nothing like a true woman's love to redeem the waywardness of man, and here ends the Phantom of Fairlie.

[THE END.]

A WIFE'S PROMISE.

A HUSBAND and wife were having one of those arguments which occasionally interrupt the harmony of married life. He grumbled because there was not a better fire in the room, and declared that she always was just so stingy in regard to the use of fuel. She rather admitted her general partiality for economy in the direction referred to, but at the same time she asserted that she was the subject of a great improvement in the specific point then under discussion. For proof on her part, she went on to state that when her first husband was very sick (he did not recover), she really felt some reluctance to having a fire of sufficient capacity to make things entirely comfortable.

"But," said she, "when my second dear departed was in his last sickness, I had such a fire as no reasonable man could find fault with. And," she continued, "when your time comes to lie in that bed, with no hope of ever rising from it, I shall have a first rate fire, as hot as—why, so hot that you will hardly know the difference when you're dead."



[THE APPARITION.]

The Ghostly Bridegroom

CHAPTER I.

WE ARE SEVEN.

I AM a Manchester girl, and my father is a Manchester mill owner. I must not tell you where our mill is situated, nor must I let you know my real name, otherwise you might recognise me, which would be exceedingly inconvenient to all of us. A few things I may state, however, and one of them is that I am going to be married to-morrow.

As I am the fourth of seven daughters, and as I have thus three sisters older than myself as well as three sisters younger, and I am the only one of the seven who has ever received an offer of marriage, you may readily believe that I am an important personage in our household at the present moment.

My mother died when Maud, the youngest of us, was born, and from a very early period of my recollection my eldest sister Margaret has ruled in her stead.

Margaret is handsome, haughty and exacting, she is good-looking too, though she is thirty, while I am only just eighteen. Eighteen is the proper age for a woman to be married at, I believe.

Margaret does not agree with me, but speaks slightly of "children," and grandly observes that a woman is never so fascinating as at five-and-thirty.

I can't argue with Margaret, she doesn't permit it; but I know I prefer being eighteen to being five-and-thirty, and I know that Victor is of the same opinion as myself.

Victor is not my first love, though this is a

secret that I have religiously kept within my own heart, for the man whom I loved, and who I once thought loved me, does not know to the present hour that I ever thought of him seriously.

The man I am going to marry is all that any girl could wish for. He is young and handsome and clever; he is rich also and is not burdened with a pedigree, for his grandfather was a weaver, and his father was overseer in the cotton mill, of which he afterwards became the proprietor.

Victor's father is dead and the mill now belongs to him, but he has no taste for trade, though he does not disdain the gold that reaches his hands through the industry of others. He leaves the care of his property to his cousin George, while he himself studies music, science and art, and writes most lovely poetry of which I am generally the subject. George is the man, Victor the gentleman, and yet, in consequence, I suppose, of my own father having worked so hard all his life, I once preferred the former.

These are not proper thoughts for a girl on the eve of her wedding-day to sit dreaming, however. George Selbourne cares nothing for me, and if he did it is too late now, for my wedding dress is lying on the spare bed upstairs, the carriages are ordered for to-morrow, the wedding cake stands white and cold-looking as a pyramid of snow on the dining-room table, and my six sisters, all of whom are to be bridesmaids, have their costumes ready for the great event.

They are very pretty costumes, just as the wearers are also fair to look upon, for I am the "ugly duckling" of the family, and as I tell them, am going off first to pioneer the way which they must follow. Margaret chose the bridesmaid's dresses, as she chose my wedding dress, and, but this I scarcely care to admit to myself, as she chose my husband for me.

For I have an uncomfortable, unreasonable feeling that Margaret has been in some way or other the cause of George Selbourne's absence

from our house, and particularly from my side, and I am still more sure of the fact that in every way possible she has encouraged the attentions to me of his cousin Victor.

She has told me over and over again that I ought to marry a rich man, and I have listened to her and seemed to acquiesce, but I have been quite conscious all the time that it was George Selbourne's coolness and not Victor Selbourne's money that made me accept the latter. However, it is all over now, and I am looking forward and trying to forget the past, and all the painful or pleasant memories connected with it.

I have been restless and uncomfortable to-day, as though something strange and unusual were going to happen. This morning I sat at my window watching the factory hands going from their work to their dinners.

The men wore rough clothing and heavy wooden clogs, the women had their heads covered with shawls, and not one of the number carried an umbrella, though the snow was falling heavily.

But they were bright and cheerful and I heard them talk of my wedding as they passed the window and of my father's liberality towards them on the occasion, and I shivered with a creeping sensation of cold and dread, and I wondered if any one of those bright ruddy cheeked girls who seemed to envy me would really change places if they knew the thoughts that haunt me.

Margaret caught me "moping," as she calls it, and she carried me off to the bedrooms and made me sit patiently by while she and the rest of the sisterhood donned the finery that has been purchased in my honour.

Cream-coloured silk and crimson velvet is what my queenly sister had chosen for herself and the others for my wedding, and I, as I sit and watch them all looking at themselves in the long mirror, cannot help being amused at their attitudes and comments.

"I'm sorry for you, Bell," says Maud, as she tilts her Gainsborough hat, with its long droop-

ing feather a trifle more on one side, "for you will be obliged to wear white, and you know dead white makes you look as brown as a berry. It's a pity too, for my dress would suit you splendidly and I look lovely in white."

"Suppose we were to change," I remark gravely. "I don't suppose Victor would object, and I am sure I shouldn't."

"Of course you can afford to pretend not to care for Victor now you are so sure of him," sneers Mary, who is two years older than I am, and whom we once thought Victor meant to propose for."

"I don't pretend anything," I retort, dejectedly, "and I'd much rather be a bridesmaid to-morrow than a bride; it makes me savage to think how you will be dancing and telling stories round the yule fire, when I am away among strangers and with only Victor to amuse me. I can't imagine which of us it was who was stupid enough to fix my wedding day for Christmas Eve."

"It was I who did it," says Margaret, in her grandly imperious manner. "I thought it would be more convenient than at any other time, and that a ball on Christmas Eve would be a nice wind up for a wedding party."

I feel inclined to make a snappish retort at this arbitrary way of settling my fate for me, but experience has taught me the utter uselessness of contesting anything with Margaret, however, as her words have made me feel particularly spiteful I determine to attack her on a much more vulnerable point than the simple question of power and authority.

I am sitting in our largest bed-room, where only two of us sleep, but where we all congregate to dress when preparing for any important occasion.

The broad door of the great wardrobe is of plate glass, and reflects six handsome girls attired in cream colour and crimson, and my own small self looking more insignificant than usual on account of my blue cloth dress which presents such a contrast to their finery, and also from the manner in which I have screwed myself up in a peculiarly comfortable arm-chair near the brightly burning fire.

My eyes wander from my fair sisters to the window, through which I watch the white flakes of snow falling thickly and almost silently, "putting a bridal robe upon the smoky city in honour of my wedding day," my sister Ella tells me, though to my mind it seem very much more like a winding sheet.

"Well," I say, meditatively, "I suppose you were right to fix my wedding day for Christmas Eve, it will give some of you a chance of following my example. The mistletoe bough will be very useful in helping a young man to come to the point, and of course you have provided an attendant knight for each bridesmaid. Who have you decided upon for yourself, Margaret?"

"I wish you wouldn't talk in such a strain, Bella," returns my eldest sister, grandly, "come to the point indeed. The observation is perfectly rude."

"Well, but who is coming," I persist; "whom do you intend to pair off with?"

Margaret frowns, but Maud volunteers the information I seek.

"Margaret is going to have George Selbourne of course; he will be best man and she will be the first bridesmaid; besides, I saw that she arranged so that his seat should be next to her own at the breakfast. Margaret thinks she and George will suit each other splendidly, don't you Meg?"

Margaret utters some angry rebuke, but I fail to notice it, and exclaim with a shudder of apprehension:

"George Selbourne is on the Continent, and he won't be back for a month, Victor himself told me so."

"He will be back in time to beat your wedding to-morrow," says Maud, positively, "Margaret had a letter from him saying so."

Margaret's face is pale and she turns away, while I—I clutch my hands so tightly together that the nails run into the soft skin and the

diamonds in my engagement ring almost cut me.

I see it all now, Margaret means to marry George herself, and because she has thought me in her way she has made up her mind that I should marry Victor, although Mary and he would have been so much better suited to each other.

In my agony I do not cry out, for all my sisters, like so many angry birds, would fall upon and peck at me, just because they envy what they consider my good fortune.

But I cannot bear the room, or the sight of those bright dresses, I must get away from it all, out into the muddy streets, out under the falling snow, anywhere for the time, till I can crush down the rebellious thoughts and feelings that now hold the mastery over me. In silence I rise from my seat and walk across the room to the door.

Only Margaret observes me and she does not speak, though I see in a glass that her eyes follow me with a shade of doubt mingled in their gleam of triumph. Yes, I am not married yet, not put quite safely out of her way, but the time before me is short, to-morrow is Christmas Eve and my wedding day; at this moment I almost wish that it was the day of my funeral.

I seek my own room, but I cannot stay there. Cold though the place is, the atmosphere of it seems to stifle me, a restless fever is in my veins. I must go somewhere, do something, and urged on by this maddening impatience of pain, I wrap myself up in a large fur-lined cloak, tie a thick gauze veil over my hat and face, and thus completely disguised and safe from observation I slip downstairs, open the front door and pass out into the street.

I walk about for some time, scarcely knowing in what direction my steps are bent. The cold air has its effect on me, and gradually cools the fever in my blood. The muddy streets, the crowds of people hurrying to and fro, paying no heed to me, yet each one of them carrying their own share of the burden of life, insensibly influence me. I begin to tell myself that I am foolish and wicked and selfish, that I have much to be thankful for, and that my suspicions of my sister are uncharitable, if not absolutely unjust.

In this frame of mind I pause before a shop window and look at the tempting display of feminine apparel that meets my gaze. A bright idea strikes me: I shall have to make some excuse for coming out alone in this manner and the most plausible one will be that I wanted to go shopping.

Now I think of it I do want sundry laces and ribbons to complete one of my dresses, and I walk into this shop, seat myself at a counter and tell a young man behind it what I require. He goes to fetch what I want and then I am conscious that two women are sitting near me, they are customers, but they are talking together earnestly, and I almost start as I hear them mention my own name.

"Poor wench," says one of them, "she's got no mother, and that sister o' hers would sell her to the Devil if he'd pay th' brass. 'Victor o' Meary's is a bad 'un, though he do look so gentle and soft spoken, and money a lass might lay her shame to his door; 'twould be a marey for th' lass if summat 'ud stop th' wedding, but I dinna know how't to be done. Sally Clows swears her'll do it, but I'm greet for poor Bella Blake."

"Poor Bella Blake!" Can they mean me? Surely not, and yet that is my name, while by many of the people Victor is called Victor o' Meary's, Mary having been his mother's name.

I puzzled over this, but dared not accost the women and ask them to tell me what they were so darkly hinting at, some feeling which I could not conquer kept me from this, but if what they suggested was true I had some real trouble before me now, and I took up my small parcel, paid for it and walked slowly home.

The question agitating and pressing on my heart now was:

Should I repeat what I had heard and demand

some explanation from Victor before it was too late, or should I thrust the horrible suspicion aside as born of mere idle gossip and ill-nature, and walk blindly in the path that others had marked out for me.

I am still abstracted and undecided when a well known knock sounds on the front door, and I am conscious that Victor Selbourne is coming to see me for the last time before we meet at the altar to become man and wife.

CHAPTER II.

WEDDING PRESENTS.

VICTOR is tall, stout, dreamy-looking and handsome. He is fully ten years older than I, and he has a way of treating me as a spoilt child that I inwardly resent and yet do not know how to make a stand against. I receive him coolly this evening but he pays no heed to my manner; he has been composing a poem in honour of our marriage and he reads it to me and to my six admiring sisters, and is far too much engrossed with his own thoughts to observe that my voice does not join in the chorus of approval.

When his verses have been duly admired Victor suddenly bethinks him of certain small morocco cases which he carries in his pocket, and he lays them out upon the table.

They are the bridesmaids' lockets which he and I have designed together, and my love of the beautiful and the pleasure I feel at seeing our joint idea so well carried out drives away all other thoughts for the moment and I forget the existence of George Selbourne and the gossip of the two women in looking at the jewellery.

The lockets bear upon them Victor's initials and mine in diamonds, and, after a time, the girls go off upon some pretext or other and Victor and I are left alone. Now is my time if I ever mean to speak about what those women were saying. I look at the man I have promised to marry and my courage to ask him any question about his past life fails me.

He looks so grand, so refined, so much older than myself, that a feeling of delicacy and humility ties my tongue and makes me think over again what I had so unexpectedly heard. And after all what had I to say? The women had made no specific charge against him, and all I could ask if I broached the subject was, whether or not he knew a girl named Sally Clows. I am still mentally debating what to do when Victor says:

"I suppose the little woman thinks I have forgotten her wedding gift, she looks so sober. Is it so, Bella?"

"Oh, no, indeed, I—"

"Don't want one, perhaps," he laughs, "but I know better; see."

And he opens a jeweller's case and exposes to view a necklace and earrings of pearls and diamonds which to my inexperienced eyes are simply beautiful, but which Margaret, who comes into the room a few minutes later, declares to be worth a small fortune.

For the first time since my engagement I think my queenly sister envies me. Her ears and throat would well set off these gleaming diamonds and satin-like pearls, and she knows it. For one moment she looks at Victor Selbourne as though she thought he had wronged her by giving them to me, then she laughs somewhat harshly as she says:

"Bella is a lucky girl, I hope she will appreciate her good fortune."

Victor laughs and makes some complimentary remark about the good fortune being his, and I feel my face flush and my eyes flash, for Margaret's observation was not a pleasant one to come from one's own sister.

All chance of speaking to Victor alone is from this minute gone. My other sisters come into the room. Papa joins us, and he also produces something brought from the jeweller's for my benefit. We get up a grand mutual admiration society upon the spot.

My father's present is a bracelet set with diamonds, and at this point the girls all bring forward their little gifts; my uncle and aunt, who

live at Oldham, likewise send their contribution by my cousin Will, who comes in most opportunely, and the laughter and the babel of voices is so loud that I at length slip out of the room just to hide myself, and think for a little while.

There is a fire in the library, though the gas is not lighted, and I creep in there, sit down on the woolly hearth-rug, take my favourite kitten in my arms and try to persuade myself that those two women were not talking about me or of my Victor, but of somebody else. I picture to myself how good and kind he is, how gentle and considerate of me in all things, and I tell my doubting heart that I do love him and that I shall love him better still when I am his wife.

Pride helps me to this, for after all, if George Selbourne had really loved me he would not have held back when his richer cousin came forward as my suitor. For George is not poor, though Victor is far richer than he. His father left him some property and he owns a small share in the mill, which he almost exclusively manages, so he could well afford to seek a wife, and though my father has seven daughters, not one of us will be quite portionless.

These thoughts flit vaguely through my mind while a servant is kept almost constantly employed in answering the door bell. Suddenly the library door opens and Margaret walks up to the hearth-rug.

"So here you are," she says, sharply, and I know from her tone that something unusual has happened.

"Yes," I reply, meekly, "they were making so much noise in the drawing-room that my head began to ache."

"Well, you will have to endure it a little longer," with a sneer. "Victor is going and there are two or three parcels for you; I suppose you'd like to open them yourself."

"Very well," I reply, rising to my feet and depositing the kitten on the rug.

"Nursing a cat," snaps Margaret, with contempt, "you ought to be still in the school-room. However, to-morrow will end it. I declare I am perfectly weary with all the fuss and bother that is being made."

"I don't think you need excite yourself," I say coolly, "you are not going to be married;" then I walk up to the drawing-room where the sisterhood, my father and Victor are awaiting me.

"I am going away, dear," says the latter.

"You must see my presents first," I return. "Dear me, what is this," and after tearing off many coverings I open a case in which is an emerald and diamond ring.

"How lovely," I exclaim, fitting it on my finger, "who is it from?"

I had failed to notice a slip of paper inside the case, but that mischievous Maud had already unfolded it and read aloud:

"With George Selbourne's compliments and best wishes."

My face becomes white, then flushes a deep crimson, and I instinctively glance at Margaret. Our eyes meet. She knew who was the giver before I did, and she both envied and triumphed over me in the same glance.

Victor admired the ring, he saw nothing in it beyond an expression of George's cousinly regard for him, and when the other parcels had been opened and admired he said he must leave us.

"Then we shall meet at church to-morrow," said my eldest sister, giving Victor her hand.

"Yes, if I am alive," with a smile.

"You can't come if you are dead," she retorted with an uncomfortable laugh.

"I don't know that," he returned, gravely; "we have a superstition in our family that any member of it who dies a sudden or violent death invariably appears to the person or persons he is thinking of at the moment, so if I am not in church my ghost may be there."

"Rubbish!" says my father, contemptuously; "ghosts indeed, I never knew anybody yet who'd seen a ghost, and until I see one with my own eyes I won't believe that there is such a thing."

"Well, all I can tell you is that I saw my own father at the hour he died though I was more than a hundred miles away from the place where he had expired," says Victor, gravely.

"Fancy, my dear fellow, fancy," returns my father, in a patronising tone; "you poets let your imaginations run away with you. Now I'm a practical man, I don't believe that I see things that aren't before me. Show me a ghost and I'll believe in it, but till I see it I call all such ideas rubbish—I repeat it, rubbish."

Victor smiles with amused tolerance. I often wonder that he and papa don't quarrel, or that some coolness does not spring up between them, for my father is so blunt and outspoken and holds his own opinion in such high estimation that many people take offence at the manner in which he speaks to or of them.

Victor and he have got on well enough together so far, however, and they part very good friends now, though the mention of ghosts makes my father irritable for the rest of the evening. As for us girls we crowd round the fire in our big bedroom and tell ghost stories till we become nervous, timid, and afraid to separate to go to our own rooms. Though to-morrow is Christmas Eve we seven are keeping it up quietly among ourselves to-night.

"It is the last time we shall all be together," Ella had said plaintively, "and we'll keep up Christmas Eve to-night as we used to do when we were children."

So cook had been ordered to send up cake and apples and negus; we had piled great logs of wood upon the wide grate, and thus we sat long into the night on this the eve of my wedding day.

CHAPTER III.

AT THE ALTAR.

I AM roused from a heavy dreamless sleep the next morning by my sister Margaret shaking my shoulder and saying:

"Do wake up, Bella, it's nine o'clock. I've brought you some breakfast. Good heavens, will the girl never wake?"

This last exclamation added to a more vigorous shake than before has the effect of making me open my eyes slowly, yawn and ask drowsily:

"What is the matter? I don't want any breakfast, I want to sleep."

"Nonsense, Bella," sharply; "don't you remember what day it is? You're going to be married to-day, and I tell you it is nine o'clock, the carriages will be here at half-past ten, and you haven't properly opened your eyes yet."

I open my eyes widely enough now, and look about the room. The fire in my grate has been lighted. On the tray that Margaret holds is a breakfast cup of steaming coffee, an egg, and a roll, while against the window from which the blind has been drawn I see the white snow beating in large flakes.

"Augh!" I exclaim, with a shudder, covering myself tightly with the bed clothes; "what a morning, we shall all be frozen to death!"

"Frozen or not you must get up," is the authoritative reply; "you will want quite an hour for dressing, and it will be absolutely cruel to keep people waiting for you in the cold."

"Have you had breakfast?" I ask, beginning to sip my coffee.

"Yes, long ago."

"Is the snow very deep on the ground?" is my next question.

"Four or five inches," is the reply; "the snow has been falling incessantly since yesterday morning."

Another shiver as I think of the fact that I shall have to wear a lace veil instead of a fur cloak. Then there is silence for a time, Margaret standing by the fireplace looking occasionally at me, but more steadfastly at the snow which falls with such incessant monotony.

"It looks like a winding sheet, doesn't it?" I ask suddenly.

My sister shivers, then laughs nervously as she says:

"The weather is seasonable enough; you must have waited for May or June to be sure of a warm fine day."

"I wish I had waited," I say fretfully.

A shrug from Margaret's fair shoulders, then I ask suddenly:

"Margaret, I haven't a mother, and you have been almost like a mother to us. I want you to tell me something. Ought a woman to marry a man that she just likes as a friend when there is another man whom she loves?"

Margaret's face becomes very white, a struggle is going on in her mind, but she says at length, with some effort:

"I should say that every woman's actions must depend upon circumstances. If the man whom a girl loves returns her affection, and if circumstances would permit them to marry, it would be but natural and right that they should do so."

"But if the man doesn't care for the girl who loves him?" I interpose, impetuously.

"Then I should say she was sadly wanting in dignity and self-respect to let him or any other human being know of her misplaced affection," says Margaret, disdainfully.

After this she leaves the room saying she will return again shortly. We are dressed at last, my six sisters and I. They all look very pretty and their dresses are rich and warm and bright, while I stand in white satin and lace and orange-blossoms, looking cold as the snow which has wrapped in white the dingy city, dreading, as I stand by the blazing fire the moment when I must go out and face the piercingly keen air.

Everything is ready. The house is decorated for Christmas as well as for a wedding. The breakfast is spread out in the dining-room, and the drawing-room is ready for the ball which is to take place there to-night.

Our bouquets have arrived, accompanied by a note from Victor begging that we will not be late, and my father, in clothes which have never been worn before and that make him look a little more like a working man out for a holiday than usual, is bustling about, giving orders here and there, bewildering the servants and getting himself so red, hot and flustered that he looks like a turkey cock with all its feathers up.

The bridesmaids have started for the church, and a few minutes later my father and I descend the wide oak staircase and enter the carriage waiting for us. I have no longer any feeling left. Any sensitive nervous feeling, I should say. My heart seems deadened, numbed, paralysed. I have no thought for the past or care for the future.

Something has to be done now, and I do not speculate even about to-morrow, and if I have any thought at all it is that I am looking far better than I expected to look, and that white satin and lace and pearls and diamonds do not make me look so brown and plain as Maud had predicted they would.

My father's mill is closed in my honour, and he has given his hundreds of workpeople a holiday. That will account perhaps for the crowds of men and women who stare at me, and who comment with undisguised freedom upon my personal appearance and prospects.

It is not a long drive to the church, but when we alight, despite all the precautions taken, the blobs of snow drive into my face, and I feel chilled and shivering by the time we are in the sacred edifice. The church is crowded with spectators in addition to a large party of friends who will return to our house for the breakfast.

My sisters form in a train behind me, my father and I walk up the aisle and with all eyes fixed upon us we reach the altar. Two clergymen are at the communion table ready to commence the service, and I look up naturally for the man I am about to marry.

My eyes droop and my face flushes, for instead of meeting the smiling gaze of Victor Selbourne I encounter that of his cousin George. Even in that momentary glance I see that George Selbourne is pale and thin and that there is a

hard look upon his face that may be the consequence of some settled resolve or that may be caused by some great effort at self-repression.

But where is the bridegroom? Even in the agitation of meeting the man whom I once thought I loved I cannot help wondering that Victor himself should be late when only two hours ago he wrote to beg that we would be early. My father looks about the church in a hot, flushed, angry way as though he thought everybody was laughing at him and he would like to kill any man or woman who ventured so much as to smile.

I stand and say nothing, though my heart is hot within me. Not so my sisters, however. We may fight and squabble among ourselves but we stand loyally together before the rest of the world, and even Margaret is becoming indignant at the slight thus put upon me.

Fear of meeting George Selbourne's eyes has departed from me. He is the groomsman, but what business has he here without the bridegroom. This question is put to him in no smothered tone by my angry father. And George answers in a whisper with anxious glances towards the church door:

"I parted from Victor scarcely an hour ago. He was ready dressed to come and said he should be here before me, as I had to call at the bank. Something must have happened, but I will go and look for him if you will wait here."

"No, let us go home," I say, while my cheeks burn, and I feel that my eyes are unnaturally bright with excitement. "I won't be married to-day. I won't!" I add more emphatically.

Scarcely have I uttered these words than I start, and a cry of surprise escapes my lips as I gasp:

"There he is."

All eyes look in the direction that I am looking, but only my father and George see what I see. By the altar rails stands Victor Selbourne, looking pale and troubled, but dressed even to his gloves for the occasion. My father, in a tone only slightly modulated out of reverence for the sacred edifice we are in, began to say:

"Nice behaviour this—"

Then in a moment the place where Victor stood was empty, he was gone! Not into the vestry, not down either of the aisles, he had not faded away or vanished in any comprehensible way, he was simply gone. We look at each other, and a shivering sense of horror comes over my father and George Selbourne and me.

My father's hand shakes and his cheek turns pale. He will not believe that he has seen a ghost, and yet he doubts not for an instant that the disembodied spirit of Victor Selbourne but two or three seconds ago stood before him. Before we can utter a word, however, we are conscious of a buzz of voices at the church door, and a man pale and breathless with some great excitement comes half way up the aisle and beckons frantically to George Selbourne.

With a white face Victor's cousin obeys the summons, but when he comes back a few seconds later we know what he has to tell us. Victor is dead! I do not shriek or faint, but oh I am so cold. I cling to my father's arm while my teeth chatter and my limbs tremble.

The clergymen hastily divest themselves of their surplices, for there will be no wedding here this morning, and one of them volunteers to take my sisters and me back to our house, while the other with my father and George go to see what has really happened. If I could only faint, only fall into a state of unconsciousness for a time, what a blessed relief it would be.

But I cannot. My eyes are staring widely open, my face is flushed, my head burns and throbs as though my brain would burst, and my hands and feet are still cold as the snow that lies so thick upon road and pavement.

I speak of Victor's ghost and the clergyman thinks I am mad, or that my reason has become untinged. He had not seen that sad-looking figure by the altar rails, neither, I afterwards discover, has anyone else, save George and my father, besides myself.

To get off my wedding finery and to shut myself away from the eyes of strangers is my first

natural impulse, and the girls help me and try to comfort me while Margaret gets rid of the guests who were to have feasted and made merry in my honour. When my father returns later on we all learn why we waited in the church in vain.

On his way to be married Victor had been killed. The carriage in which he sat had on its way to the church to pass some large buildings in course of construction, and at the very moment he was going by, one of the high walls fell outwards with all the scaffolding, burying horse, carriage, driver and occupant in the ruin. Victor had been killed on the spot, and only an accident had prevented George from riding by his cousin's side and in all probability sharing his fate.

"You saw his ghost in the church, papa?" I ask with a shiver when my father had finished his mournful tale.

"Hush, my dear, I saw something," he replies while his own lips tremble; "'tis a funny world, a funny world, and there's more in it than we know of?"

Then he leaves me, and I sit stunned as it were. I have not shed a single tear. I have much more inclination to laugh than to cry, but my voice sounds strange and hollow even to myself, and my head aches, and throbs and burns with such sharp agony as to stifle for the time all other pain. And so that short winter's day dies out, while the snow still falls pitilessly in the crowded streets of Manchester.

Other homes are cheerful, keeping Christmas Eve merrily with song and feast and dance, but we sit mute and miserable, the wedding feast untasted, and the wedding cake standing like a monument of icy misery in the midst of it.

The day dies at last, but when the bells rang out on Christmas morning I did not hear them, I was raving in the delirium of fever. The bridegroom lay dead and the bride seemed to be hastening to join him.

CHAPTER IV.

MY OWN TRUE LOVE.

TWELVE months have passed since Victor died, and I have myself been very close indeed to the borders of the land of eternal sleep. I do not pretend that my illness was owing to grief at the loss of my bridegroom, but the manner of his death and the shock brought on brain fever, from which I was so slow to recover that, directly I was well enough to travel, my father and Margaret carried me off to the south coast in search of new health and strength.

Since then I have been taken about to many places in France and Switzerland and Italy, and I have not been home much more than four and twenty hours, so that what has happened in my absence I know only from others. Whether or not there was any foundation for the dark suspicions which those two women, whose conversation I overheard, entertained of Victor I do not know, nor am I ever likely to do so.

George, his cousin, was his heir-at-law and has succeeded to his property; indeed George Selbourne is a very important man now, and there is some talk about his becoming a candidate for a seat in Parliament at the next election. All this does not concern me, however. George and I have never met since my ill-fated wedding day, and I tell myself again and again that I have long since ceased to care for him.

Despite my indifference I do feel a little nervous this evening, for it is Christmas Day. We are to have a large party to-night, George Selbourne is to be one of the guests, and I have to-day for the first time put aside my black dress and arrayed myself in bright colours. It seems odd to wear pale blue now I have become so accustomed to black, but Margaret in her usual queenly style informs me that blue suits me, so I have consented to be persuaded to wear what finds favour in her eyes.

Of all my sisters Margaret has changed most during the past year. We are still seven

married girls, but three of the number are now engaged and Margaret is one of them. I often wonder if she cares for the man she has promised to marry.

If she does she has an odd way of showing it; but then Margaret is odd, and as her future husband has already disposed of one wife, and is possessed of several grown-up daughters no one will believe that my sister's heart can be much concerned in the matter.

I was greatly surprised when the news of this engagement reached me, for I had been expecting for a long time to hear that she and George Selbourne were going to be married, and, if the real truth be told, the expectation of this event had something to do with my prolonged absence from home.

I have been very busy this afternoon, for we girls have once more assured ourselves that this will be the very last Christmas that we shall all be at home together, so we have determined to be children for the last time and to have a splendid Christmas tree.

Not to make our absurdity too glaring we have really invited a lot of children, and we shall have a dinner party followed by a dance. I know it must be papa's wickedness, no one else would dare to provide it, particularly when we have forbidden the smallest scrap of mistletoe to be brought into the house, but I find small boughs of it hanging in all sorts of places where one would least expect to see such a thing.

If we had any brothers of our own the girls and I would not so much object to mistletoe because people might then believe that the boys had insisted upon having it, but for a family of girls to hang mistletoe all about is like asking every man that comes to the house to kiss us, and we have very properly put our collective foot down upon such a piece of folly.

The children come and have a grand treat, but as they are most of them cousins in some degree more or less remote, and as they have their nurses with them they are packed off to our old school-room before our dinner party commences. Our family is a large one to-night if all who sit at the long table are to be counted as belonging to it.

There are the men to whom three of my sisters are engaged; there are uncles and aunts and cousins and friends, making twenty in number, and sitting next to me, having taken me down to dinner in fact, is George Selbourne.

He and I don't get on very well together; we are awkward with each other. I am afraid to talk about the past lest I should say too much or too little and he evidently shrinks from the subject, perhaps from fear that he should pain me. So we behave as stiffly and coolly to each other as though we had met this evening for the first time, and however much we may laugh and smile with others, we are only most scrupulously polite when we are compelled to speak together.

Dinner is over at last. I retire with the other ladies to the drawing-room, but I soon manage to slip away from them, and I hide myself in one of the dark corners of the long conservatory.

I think nobody knows of my retreat, and it was not till long afterwards that I learnt that my mischievous sister Maud not only told someone where I had hidden myself, but also of a wicked bough with white berries on it that swung over my head.

"You must have loved Victor very dearly, Bella, to mourn for him so persistently," says a voice by my side soon after I have seated myself in this corner.

Surprised by the suddenness of the observation into speaking the truth I say impulsively:

"That's the worst of it, I never did love him."

"Bella!" in a voice of incredulous surprise. "It's true, I am sorry to say," I continue, hanging down my head in real contrition. "I tried very hard, and if he had lived, I might have succeeded, but, I'm sorry to say it's true, I didn't love him."

"You kept your secret well," he says, a

trifle bitterly. "Your sister Margaret told me—"

I interrupt him with rising anger as I say: "My sister Margaret knew the truth, the whole truth, and but for her persuasion I should never have accepted your cousin."

As I say this I try to pass him, but he detains me gently but firmly as he implores: "One moment, Bella. I came to this house eighteen months ago to tell you that I loved you and not without hope that you loved me. You were not at home but I talked with Margaret. She guessed my errand and delicately and tenderly she told me that you loved my cousin Victor. I was almost heart-broken, but I loved you far too well to spoil your life through any selfishness, and I kept away from your side, and I believed I was doing it all for your happiness."

"Oh, if I had only known!" I sob, sinking back in my seat and covering my face with my hands.

He is on his knees by my side, speaking in eager, passionate tones.

"Bella, my only love. Tell me? Can it be true, can you, do you love me?"

"I have never loved anyone else," I half whisper. And he clasps me in his arms, calls me his own darling, and kisses me rapturously.

"Improving the shining hours under the mistletoe, I perceive," says the voice of that tease of a Maud. "I am shocked at you, Bella, quite shocked. I always thought you were a proper, well-behaved young woman, but now—"

Whatever she means to say besides is smothered by George, who first of all drags her under the mistletoe and kisses her, to put her in a good temper, he says, and then gravely informs her that he and I are going to be married as soon as ever I will consent. Whereupon Maud bestows a hug on both of us, gives us her blessing, informs us that she shall come and live with us, and then dances off to carry the news to the rest of the sisterhood and papa.

The consequence of this is that when George and I, looking flushed and a trifle sheepish, do screw up our courage sufficiently to join the others, we are received with so much effusion and half-veiled congratulations that George makes a virtue of necessity and gravely informs my father that he is at that moment the happiest man in Manchester. To which papa replies, "Umph, I wonder what all the rest would say," but that's just like papa.

After this I don't care to dance except with George, and though I have looked forward to something like a romp this evening I am not sorry when the guests depart, and only George and my father and sisters remain behind.

I cannot help observing that Margaret looks pale and far from happy. No doubt she is ashamed of the part she has played in the past, and I—I pity her. Anger and resentment have no place in my heart, for I am too supremely happy to entertain them, and thus when George entreats that my father and I will not keep him waiting I tacitly agree to his fixing the earliest day possible for our wedding.

"Then we will be married on New Year's Day, Bella," he says, holding my hand firmly in his own.

"There will be no time to get any dresses ready," expostulates Margaret, "and you couldn't wear that white dress that has once been so unlucky."

"I won't have a white dress or a bridesmaid this time," I say, with decision. "I leave that for the rest of you. I'll be married in my travelling dress, and I'll be ready on New Year's Day, George."

And I was. There was no ghost at this wedding, neither was the bridegroom absent. All the gorgeous show of shimmering silks and glittering gems was conspicuous by its absence this time, and we went to church quietly without fuss or parade.

But I had no doubt in my mind when I went up to the altar to join my fate with the man who loved me, for on this occasion I

could say from my very heart, "I also love him."

My father has had nothing but weddings in his house this year. I began the migration, and before June was past only Margaret remained to take care of him. My husband is all that I could wish or desire, but he too shares the strange heritage of the Selbournes, and he is never absent from home when I expect him, or late in keeping an appointment, but I look about anxiously with a haunting fear upon me lest something fatal may have occurred, and that I shall see his ghost before me.

The fancy is a horrible one and I try to drive it away, but the recollection of my phantom bridegroom comes back to me when I am low-spirited or depressed, as though it would even mar the joy of my wedded happiness. But it cannot, George loves me so dearly that I never can be really sad.

Christmas has come once more. The ghosts of the past have fled and the bells once more peal forth their joyous melody, recalling to our minds the glad tidings of great joy that the angels brought to the shepherds in Judea more than eighteen centuries ago.

Perhaps the sound finds a warmer echo in my heart now than it has ever done before, for to-day we are not only going to have a Christmas party, but also a christening party.

My father, my sisters and their husbands are our guests to-night. Happy smiles light up every face, joy fills every heart, and I sincerely hope that all who read this are as happy as I am and that their Christmas will be as merry as ours.

[THE END.]

THE BEST CHRISTMAS-BOX OF ALL.

CHRISTMASTIDE—bright, joyous Christmas-tide, when though the snow lay thick upon the ground, and the wind howled loudly, within all was bright and cheerful, and at Thornton Manor in particular light feet and lighter hearts made the old place ring with merriment.

Old Squire Thornton was one of the school that has so nearly died away. He kept up the customs which have nearly grown obsolete. Always on Christmas Eve his house was filled with guests, and others came from the neighbourhood to join in the festivities. No waltzes, no mazurkas, but good old-fashioned country dances, games of forfeits, charades, and Christmas carols, supper in the grand old hall, hung with holly and mistletoe, and bright with all the radiance of a large wood fire.

Seven o'clock and three girls sat over the dressing-room fire talking. Two were the squire's daughters, bright laughing creatures of twenty and twenty-two, with nut brown hair, large blue eyes and rosy cheeks, as became lassies who had been born and bred in the fine north country.

But the third was different. Her home, too, was at the manor, but she was of no kin to the girls who loved her as a sister. People said that years ago her mother had been the squire's plighted wife. It might have been; certainly he cared for Helen Stuart quite as much as for his own Kate and Maggie.

Who could have helped caring for her? She seemed a creature made for love. She was small and fragile, her eyes of a deep clear violet, fringed with long lashes; her hair of bright glittering brown; her smile the sweetest yet most provoking you ever saw. She would try your patience twenty times a day, and yet no one had ever disliked her for a consecutive half hour. She wore a long dress of black velvet, cut square in front to show her white throat; it was trimmed with quaint old lace, and

he wore a bunch of fuchsias at her bosom. Not a single jewel or ornament. The squire's daughters wore fashionable ball dresses, and the Thornton jewels on their neck and arms. They were lively, pretty girls, but their faces were not those to linger in a man's heart like Helen's.

"Percy Clive is coming to-night," said Maggie Thornton, suddenly, speaking to her sister, but looking at Helen.

For an instant the fair face crimsoned. Then she listened indifferently to Kate's reply.

"Yes, papa told me he had invited him to stay a week."

"A week!" said Helen, suddenly. "Whatever for?"

"Because he wants to see him, I suppose. Never mind, Helen; Sir James will take good care he does not monopolise too much of your attention."

"It is no business of Sir James'."

"He thinks it is. Don't you know, dear, Sir James intends asking you to be Lady Carrington?"

"I should like to be rich, awfully."

"What a mercenary child!"

"She doesn't mean it," put in Kate.

"Yes, I do," announced Helen, firmly. "I don't believe in love."

Half an hour after the three were downstairs in the ball-room, the Misses Thornton, as hostesses, fully occupied, and Helen Stuart dancing with a listless, pre-occupied air strangely different to her usual custom. In all the room she saw but one face, but one man filled her thoughts—Percy Clive. On this particular Christmas Eve, while the band played gaily, while she moved in the mazes of the dance, a great truth had dawned upon her. The love she had professed to scoff at, the passion she did not believe in, had come to her. Then Helen Stuart, whose beautiful face was her only dower, who looked on riches as a necessity, and had fully meant to make a wealthy marriage, woke up to the knowledge that her whole heart was Percy Clive's.

Of all the men who had crossed her path he was almost the only one who had never shown his admiration for her. From their first meeting a year ago he had never paid her a single compliment, had never given her reason to think he cared for her, and yet she remembered every word he had ever spoken to her. He was poor, quite poor. Two or three hundred a year all told, perhaps, comprised his income, and he was as proud as she.

"Even if he cares for me," thought Helen, bitterly, "he will never tell me;" and so with a strange pain at her heart she danced and smiled, and yet through it all her violet eyes avoided the gaze of those brown ones; at least he should not guess her secret.

Presently, when the evening was far advanced, and the flowers in her dress were drooping, he came up to her and spoke some simple words of greeting.

"Are you not going to dance with me?" asked the beauty.

"I thought your card would be full."

"We don't have cards to-night."

Silence deep. The band struck up.

"It is a quadrille;" and she moved nearer to him.

"Do you mean I am to have it?"

"If you like. Don't say I asked you to dance with me."

"I am not likely to say that, Miss Stuart, and no one would believe me if I did."

They took their places almost in silence. Then, between the figures, they conversed on the most indifferent topics.

"I am so hot," said Helen, when the last strains had died away. "Mr. Clive, please take me on to the terrace."

"It is not wise," he remonstrated.

"I never take cold."

He wrapped a shawl round her and offered her his arm. They went out on to the terrace. It was a strange change from the scene they had just left. Low before them lay the manor grounds in their white covering of snow, above them the sky bright with myriads of stars. Even the few shrubs on the terrace had their

petals tipped with snow. For some minutes neither spoke, then Mr. Clive said, quietly:

"May I claim a friend's privilege and congratulate you, Miss Stuart?"

"What on?" with a lightness she was very far from feeling.

"Your engagement. I have the pleasure of knowing Sir James Carrington. His estate is one of the finest in Kent."

"Is it?"

"Having heard of your views respecting a fortune, I can congratulate you on the brilliant one that will be yours."

"I am very much obliged to you, Mr. Clive." She was too proud to deny the fact of the engagement, too angry to condescend to an explanation. And yet he had good grounds for what he said. In her heedless manner, she had laughed at love in his presence. Poor outspoken Helen! she had made no secret of her mercenary intentions, only no one else had believed her. Perhaps Percy Clive would not have done so had he been less interested in the matter.

"What a lovely night it is!"

"It is my favourite night of all the year. When I was a little child," shyly, "I used to believe the fairies came down to earth on Christmas Eve and granted us one wish."

"If you were a child now," he said, "what would you wish for?"

"A new doll, most probably."

"You misunderstand me. I meant, if you still believed the pretty fancy of your childhood, what would you wish for to-night?"

"I don't know."

"Shall we make a compact, Miss Stuart? Shall you and I, standing here alone, each make a wish and tell it to no one?"

"Yes, I should like that. What shall you wish, Mr. Clive?"

"I will tell you another time."

"When? Next year?"

"You forget you will not be here."

"Ah, no! Don't you think, Mr. Clive, Thornton Manor will be a much pleasanter place to visit at when freed from my presence?"

"It will be a much safer place," gravely, "but I shall not come to see it."

"Not come! Why not?"

"I am going out to India early in the New Year. This is my farewell visit to the Manor."

"Is it really? How sorry Kate and Maggie will be, and the squire."

"I fancy Kate and Maggie will have something else to think of."

"Nonsense! Even if they are engaged do you think they can't remember their friends, Mr. Clive?"

"I fancy being engaged means something more to them than to you."

"Don't scold me," said Helen, with a rare, sweet penitence in her tone. "Don't scold me, if this is to be our last Christmas Eve here."

"I have no right to scold you."

They were turning to enter the house when Helen gave a sudden cry.

"My flowers—I have lost them."

Percy Clive did not tell her they were resting in the pocket of his coat. Instead he bent down and secured some holly berries which had been placed among the decorations.

"You will prick yourself."

"It is nothing," as he arranged the berries on their crisp leaves; "it is not the first time. Will you let me fasten them for you? You must not hurt your fingers."

He was a long time over his task. She raised her hand to help him, and their fingers met. The icy coldness of hers ran through her glove. "The air has been too keen for you. You have taken a chill."

Poor Helen might have answered that it was so, only the chill was to her heart, not to her fingers; but she said nothing, and they went back to the ball-room to meet Sir James Carrington, full of a fussy anxiety at Miss Stuart's absence. Percy resigned her to the baronet, looked once into the violet eyes, which drooped beneath his gaze, and went away to rue the day when first he and Helen had met.

"Poor men shouldn't be endowed with hearts."

It's a mistake on the part of Nature to give them such an unnecessary luxury when she has been so chary in other respects," he thought, bitterly.

Sir James Carrington was a small, insignificant man of about forty. His eyes were of the mildest and most insipid grey, his complexion of the shade termed whitey brown, and his hair, which was getting scanty, the exact colour of rope. A gentleman, and a kind-hearted one, but neither in intellect or appearance calculated to touch a young girl's heart. He loved Helen Stuart very truly. He was not seeking merely an appanage to his house, a pretty face to adorn his home, but a wife who should be a companion and friend. He had gone through the world with his heart untouched all his lifetime, but when he met beautiful, portionless Helen he loved her as devotedly as if he had been in his first youth.

She knew this. At first, in her dread of poverty (her mother had made a rash marriage, been disowned by her family, and died almost in want), Helen fully meant to accept the baronet, but even before she found out the secret of her own heart her intention wavered. To take all and give nothing was repugnant to her feelings. If she could have looked on the affair as an equal bargain it would have been different—she would have thought her youth and beauty a fair exchange for Sir James' wealth and title. But now that he had thrown into the scale all the love of his honest heart all was changed, and she bitterly regretted the encouragement she had given him.

"It is a country dance," he said to her. "Will you sit it out with me?"

She assented. She felt pretty certain what Sir James was about to say, but she knew that she had given him almost the right to say it, and that in justice she must hear him. Perhaps the bitter pain at her own heart helped her to feel for him. He took her to the library and placed her in an easy chair. It was almost the only room not thrown open to company, and there they were free from interruption.

"Helen," said the baronet, tenderly, "I think you can guess why I have brought you here, can you not?"

She raised her violet eyes to his, but there was no light in their depths, no blush crimsoned her fair cheeks. She looked ill and weary, but not in the least confused.

"I am afraid I can."

"Helen, my darling, I want you to give yourself to me. I want you to let me spend all my life in trying to make you happy."

She tried to speak, but the words would not come. A great lump seemed to rise in her throat, and her eyes filled with tears.

"I am not a young man, Helen, but I love you with all my heart. You are the one love of my life. It is an entire devotion I offer you."

For an instant she was sorely tempted. Would not the baronet's love help her to forget Percy's coldness? This deep tenderness surely might win her heart from the man who treated her only with cold sarcasm; but her eyes fell on the holly berries Percy had placed in her dress. They gave her courage to be true to herself.

"I am very sorry, Sir James, I am not worthy of your love."

"You are worthy of much more," he said, gravely. "Helen, cannot you forget the years between us?"

"I am not so selfish as to take all and give nothing. Sir James, I have been very wrong. Till a few days ago I meant—Heaven forgive me!—to marry you. I did not love you, but I fancied women could get through the world without love."

"And now?" he asked, gently.

"And now I know that just as you love me I love another. Oh, Sir James, forgive me! I did not mean to deceive you. It was almost in spite of myself."

"Don't reproach yourself, Helen. It was my fault."

But she was too true to agree to this.

"Oh, no, it was mine; but I did not know. I

never guessed till to-night that nothing in the world could conquer my love for him."

"And you are another's?"

She shook her head.

"Oh, no! I don't think he cares for me. If he does he will never tell me. He is poor and proud, and he thinks I care only for riches."

Sir James Carrington bent his head and pressed his lips to her forehead. There was none of a lover's passion in his kiss. It had in it more of the sorrowful resignation with which we caress for the last time those we have lost.

"My dear, you have your own trouble. Don't let any thought of mine add to it. Only Helen, remember I ask no higher privilege in this world than to serve you."

He left her then, and she, feeling that the events of the evening had robbed the ball-room of its charms for her, sat in the easy chair looking dreamingly at the fire, and thinking sadly of the two men who for all time had influenced her life, the one she loved and the one who loved her.

Presently she rose with a half sigh. It was very late. She should be missed. She was going towards the door, when on the long oaken table she saw a letter directed to herself. It was the squire's custom to have the letter bag brought to him in the library. Doubtless, in the excitement of the Christmas festivities, he had forgotten to give her this missive, which had, perhaps, come by the late post.

She took it up and glanced carelessly at it. The writing was unknown to her, and it was directed in full to "Miss Helen Devereux Stuart." She had been christened Devereux because it was her mother's maiden name, but never once could she remember receiving a letter bearing the title. Half curiously, half idly, she tore open the envelope.

"PUMP COURT, TEMPLE."

"MADAME,"

"As the solicitors to your late grandfather John, seventh Baron Devereux, we have the pleasure to acquaint you that by a will, executed a week before his death, he has bequeathed to you all his funded property, amounting to thirty thousand pounds; the estates and real property, being entailed, pass to a distant cousin. Awaiting the favour of your instructions,

"We are, Madame,

"Your obedient servants,

"WATERHOUSE AND MARSHALL."

The girl read the missive over like one in a dream.

"I would give it all up," she murmured, faintly, "just to hear him say he loved me, just to have his arm round my neck. What good will the money do me? Percy will go to India and spend the best years of his life in struggling to get rich, and I must stay here alone."

She put the letter away, passed her hand lightly over her forehead as though to smooth the sad thoughts that were clouding her brow, then, half reluctantly, she went back to the ball-room. She did not dance, for she met the squire, whose special darling she was, and he carried her off to another room, where some of the young ones were having a game at forfeits. She took a seat and did as they told her, but her thoughts were not in the game, and her forfeits grew many quickly. Her fan, her handkerchief, her gloves were gone. She looked round her in despair.

"I really haven't got anything else."

"Give one of your holly berries," suggested a young lady near her. "If you only give one betry the spray will last some time."

Helen shook her head.

"I can't give those, Alice. I want them, every one."

"The spray would look just the same without one, or even two."

"But it wouldn't be the same."

"Supper will be ready soon," cried the squire, in his hearty voice, always ready to get

his pet out of any difficulty, real or imaginary. "You'd better begin to cry the forfeits, Miss Alice, or may be they won't get redeemed."

"Ah, that will be best, Mr. Clive," called out the lively girl, "will you come here and help me cry the forfeits?"

He came at once. Helen wondered how long he had been in the room, and if he had heard her excuse about the holly. She hoped not. Her cheeks grew hot at the very thought.

Everything was done after the dear old style. They passed a handkerchief over his eyes, and he knelt at Miss Alice's feet and duly pronounced sentence upon the owners of each of the "pretty things" she held up to him. The punishments were the ordinary ones of eating an inch off the poker, singing a song, bowing to the prettiest, &c. Helen was congratulating herself on getting off very easily, when she beheld her fan in the judge's hand, and remembered the familiar saying, "Don't hallo till you are out of the wood."

Helen's sentence was prompt.

"To answer three questions."

"Well, that's easy enough, Helen," commented Alice. "What questions shall we ask her, Mr. Clive?"

"We must think," he returned, lightly. "It is a subject for grave consideration."

But before they had even begun to consider it there was a general move to the supper-room, and Miss Alice disappeared on the arm of a very youthful cavalier. Helen drew back and somehow by an accidental oversight no one missed her, and she was left alone. There was no intentional slight. No one meant the least unkindness, but as she turned and saw herself alone, a bitter sense of desolation came to her.

No thought of following the gay revellers struck her. She felt as one among them, but not of them. Slowly, sadly, as some stricken deer, some animal wounded in the hunt, she crept back to the library, and there where she had learnt the fleeter ship which had given her so little pleasure, she threw herself into a chair and sobbed as though her heart would break. It was so hard—so very hard. Other girls' love affairs went smoothly enough, and hers seemed such a tangled web.

She wondered dimly as she grew calmer if her life would be like to-night. Should she always see merry faces around her, and yet be sad; always see others having good times, and yet be out in the cold? How long would Percy Clive stay in India? Should she be quite an old woman when he came back? Perhaps when he was married and they were both quite old, or when she was dying (and she hoped that might be soon, if she was always to be so unhappy) she might tell him all about to-night, and how she had not really been the cold, mercenary girl he had thought her.

"Love is a strange thing," mused this young philosopher. "I daresay Sir James does not feel much happier than I do. Oh, why on earth didn't we both care for each other instead of wasting our hearts on people who did not want them. Love's a mistake."

No, Helen, not that; love is still the elixir of life. If it brings us many a pang, it has its pleasures—rarer, keener than any others earth produces. We do not all agree with the poet when he says:

Where, when the gods would be cruel,
Do they go for a torture—where
Plant thorns, set pain as a jewel?
Not in the flesh; not there.
In the heart is the prey of the gods,
Who crucify hearts, not hands.

And yet if anyone had asked Helen Stuart on this Christmas Eve for her opinion I think she would have echoed these words, for the bitter pain at her heart seemed to make them a truth. Suddenly the sound of bells fell on her ear, and going to the window and pushing back the heavy curtains with her dainty hand, she opened it, and leaning out she listened to the Christmas chimes which speak peace and good will to men. She felt a hand upon her shoulder whose touch thrilled her through and through.

"Miss Stuart?"

She did not turn her head; she was all too

conscious of the tear stains on her face to wish to expose it to the brilliant light of the gaselier. She did not speak; she felt dimly she could not trust her voice—that choking sensation which had attacked her once before that evening had returned stronger than ever.

"Won't you speak to me, Helen?"

It was Percy's voice—that voice which was emphatically the one in all the world for her, but it was changed. The deep feeling he had always tried to conceal now sounded in it; the assumed coldness was all gone. He took her hand.

"You should not be here, it is too cold for you."

He led her to the fire, and still holding her hand, said, smilingly:

"Helen, I want you to redeem your forfeit."

"My forfeit?"

"Yes. Don't you remember the penalty? You were to answer three questions. Well, I have come to ask them now."

"Did Alice send you?"

"No, I came myself. Say, Helen, will you answer them?"

"Not without knowing what they are."

"Why didn't you come to supper?"

"Nobody asked me, sir, she said," with a faint attempt at her usual gaiety.

"Well, now for the second question. Have you quarrelled with Sir James Carrington?"

"Quarrelled with him! Why he is the best friend I have in the world!"

"Helen?"

"Don't look at me like that."

"Don't you think you have deceived me most terribly?"

"I never told you I was engaged to Sir James."

"You implied it."

"You seemed so thoroughly to believe it that I—let you."

"Helen?"

"Yes."

"I have not asked my third question."

"Do not ask it if it is like the others."

"It is more personal. Helen, why would you not give these as a forfeit?" and he touched the holly berries.

"Did you value them?"

"You have no right," she began, quickly.

"I think I have. They were my gift. Helen, will you accept another gift?"

She did not answer, and he went on, eagerly:

"Heaven knows I have struggled against my infatuation, darling. I have only love to offer. Will that atone to you for poverty?"

"Percy," said the girl, timidly, yet speaking his name, not as a strange lesson, but as a dear familiar word. "Percy, I was mistaken; love is better than riches. In all this world I want but one thing—your love."

Her head fell back on his shoulder. His arm was round her waist; his lips took warm kisses from her unresisting ones; and she was happy.

"You are quite sure, Helen?"

"Do you doubt me?"

"You know you always pretend to be such a practical, worldly-wise young lady."

"Don't, Percy," faintly.

"Are you crying, my darling? You know I never meant it. Helen, can you think I was in earnest, after what you have given up for me?"

Silence—perfect silence; only those lips meet again and again, and Christmas Eve is a thing of the past, for it is long past twelve.

"Percy," timidly, "when did you first begin to like me?"

"I never liked you at all, Helen."

"Why, then—"

"Don't you understand, little lady? Those violet eyes did their work the first time I ever saw them; only you had such a longing for wealth, and I was such a shocking detrimental, so I struggled as long as I could against your fascinations."

"And you were going to India to forget me?"

"Or to try to."

"I hope you won't try to forget me now." "No fear of that; besides, Helen, I sha'n't go. I fancy my real object was to avoid seeing a grand wedding at St. George's, Hanover Square, which should convert you into Lady Carrington."

"And you won't go now?"

"Well, no, I think not. You see, Helen, I shouldn't be easy at leaving you behind, and I am quite sure the squire would never risk an Indian climate for his darling."

"And you'll come down here often, won't you? You'll not really make this your last visit?"

"When once you let me take you away I'll promise we'll both pay any number of visits here."

"But—" she stammered.

He understood her.

"You see, I'm not quite such a detrimental now, Helen. Someone has died and left me just enough to keep two people nicely."

"How very funny," thinking of the letter to herself.

"No, I can't quite say that; the old gentleman was past eighty; his death was a very natural event."

The door opened; Helen retreated to a proper distance from her lover, and appeared to be looking at the fire. It was only Maggie Thornton.

"Everyone has gone," she began, brightly, "and we are thinking about going to bed. Helen, we have been hunting everywhere for you."

"And I have been here all the while. I was too tired to come to supper."

"I have been taking care of her, Miss Thornton."

"Oh!" said Maggie, with such an emphasis that both the listeners smiled.

"Yes," returned Helen, just as though her friend had asked her a question. "I'm going to turn over a new leaf, and be very good."

Maggie kissed her, and held out her hand to Mr. Clive.

"I haven't congratulated you on the other event yet; but papa has only just told me. You know how glad we are for you."

"What other event?" exclaimed Helen.

"Hasn't he told you of his good fortune?"

"That he had some money?" in a vague surprise. "Oh, yes. Is that what you mean?"

"You goose! Of course he has some money. Why he's Lord Devereux, with a town house and a country seat, and ever so many thousands."

Helen looked from one to the other as though she were bewildered.

"Darling," said Percy, when Miss Thornton had retreated, "forgive me. It is quite true. I am Lord Devereux, and, I think, a remote cousin of your own; but I value neither title nor fortune in comparison with the precious promise you have given me to-night."

Somewhere in a casket, dry and withered, Lady Devereux keeps a bunch of holly berries in memory; she tells her children of a great joy that came to her one Christmas Eve.

"Was it a Christmas box, mamma?" asks a curly-headed boy.

And the young mother smiles as she answers:

"Yes, Percy; the Best Christmas Box of All."

[THE END.]

SEPARATING AT A LATE DAY.

A MARRIED couple, after having lived together over sixty years, recently separated. It cannot be said that they did not take sufficient time to discover an "incompatibility of temper," which made them miserable in each other's society. One would suppose, however, that after threescore years they might have managed to "worry through" the remainder of their days.

THE FRIGHTENED PORTER; OR, A WEIRD QUARTETTE.

THE following story I once heard the late James Henry Hackett relate in the box-office of the old N— Theatre. Grand old Hackett! His impersonation of Jack Falstaff was an event in one's life never to be forgotten; and he could tell a story as well as act upon the stage. If this has never been in print, it ought to be; and if it has, perchance, it is certainly good enough to repeat.

Once upon a time a gay and festive party—four bon-vivants, set out from London upon a trip into the country, determined to have a good time, if such a thing could be brought to pass. One of these men had a full set of false teeth; and as that was in the days when the dental art, as distinctive from common surgery, was in its infancy, it may well be supposed that a man with such an appliance would furnish a marvel to the great mass of the uneducated people; aye and he might afford surprise to some who were educated.

A second man of the party, who had by accident lost an eye, had had the missing optic replaced by an eye of glass, so skilfully and perfectly made that no man not knowing the facts would have suspected anything wrong. A third man of the quartette was furnished with a cork leg. The original limb of human tissues had been taken off very near to the hip-joint, so that it would appear that the whole leg was coming away when the thing of art was removed. The fourth man was peculiar in that nothing at all was the matter with him. He was a healthy, happy, jolly fellow, and general superintendent of the affairs of the jaunt.

Our four heroes pulled up for spending the first night away from the metropolis at St. Albans, on the great North-western mail-stage road. They found a good inn, a capital landlord, a pleasant landlady, and very willing servants. A merry evening was passed, and, until the hour for retiring came, music and mirth occupied the time in the parlour, where they were served with their wine and their pipes. At the stroke of eleven the landlord was summoned, and directed to send a good and faithful servant to assist them in preparing for bed.

They were to occupy for sleeping, two chambers, with two single beds in each, and they were conducted to the dormitory by the porter of the house, a stout, pleasant-faced Hertfordshire man, whom the host had detailed to render such assistance as might be required. Arrived at their destination, where they found the door between the two chambers so broad that it came very near to throwing both rooms into one, they arranged themselves for commencing the play they had determined upon.

"Look you, my good man," said he of the false teeth, sitting upon the edge of his bed, and throwing back his head, "I want you to come and help me take out my teeth."

The honest fellow was surprised, and the tremor that shook his powerful frame when he beheld the full set of white gleaming teeth, the teeth of both jaws, resting in their owner's hand told that the thing was new to him.

"Odds bodkins!" he cried, "I never seed the loike, never!"

"Well, well," exclaimed the man of the artificial optic; "never mind him. Do you just come hither, and help me to take out my eye!"

At first the porter hesitated, but upon a second summons he went to the work, and his astonishment, when he saw the guest's eye really and truly taken from its socket, and held in its owner's hand, was something to be remembered.

"Body an' soul o' me, what kind of a mortal be ye?"

"Here!" called he of the cork extremity, impatiently; "just you let that man's eye be, and do you come hither, and help me to take off my leg!"

A murmur of astonishment, mingled with alarm, fell from the porter's lips as he turned

towards the third man. Ordinarily, the sight of a wooden peg in the place of a human leg, would not have surprised him at all; but the sight of this perfectly formed limb, which moved like a living leg, coming off, as it appeared to him, at the hip-joint, and, further, taken in connection with the foregoing events—startled him. But he survived the shock, and was helping the abbreviated man into his bed, when the fourth guest, in tones which sounded like a wail from the tomb, called for his attendance in that quarter.

This fourth man, while his companions had been playing their parts, had removed his cravat and dicky, and bared his throat, and had then drawn around his neck a strong bit of linen thread, and tied it so tightly that it sank into the flesh, making a deep, livid crease.

"Presumptuous mortal!" said the guest, in awful tones, at the same time bobbing his head to and fro, and rolling his great and staring eyes, "come hither and help me to take off my head! Fetch me a napkin, and be careful that you do not drop the sacred burden when I shall have given it into your keeping. Be quick! I feel the moment is propitious!"

The poor porter gave one long, frightened look at the livid line where the neck was to be separated, and at the strangely rolling eyes, and then, utterly appalled, he rushed for the door, and down the stairs, bellowing as he went:

"Oh! murder, murder! They're takin' their-selves all to pieces, and now the witch 'll take his head off. I didn't do it. I didn't!"

Later the landlord found the poor fellow hid away in the stable, fearful of being literally bewitched if he should be forced into that weird company again.

R. H.

S P H I N X .

I. FLOWERS ENIGMATICALLY EXPRESSED.

1. A bird, and to incite.
2. A maid, a rosy tint, and a familiar plant.
3. To spoil, a pronoun, and a precious metal.
4. To break, and a genus of reptile.
5. To fasten, and a letter of the alphabet.
6. A cunning animal, and a covering for the hand.
7. The head of an animal, a kind of vessel, and an adverb.
8. A vehicle, and a multitude.
9. A fence, and to blossom.

J. D. A.

II. CHARADE.

My first is a bird, my second is a small bird, and my whole is the habitation of my first.

LOADAMIA.

III. REBUS.

My first is in lute, but not in harp;
My second is in trout, but not in carp;
My third is in new, but not in old;
My fourth is in warmed, and also in cold;
My fifth is in sparrow, but not in hawk;
My sixth is in silence, but not in talk;
My seventh is in torrent, and also in river;
My eighth is in heart, and also in liver;
My ninth is in aunt, but not in uncle;
My tenth is in diamond, but not in carbuncle;
My eleventh is in red, and also in blue;
My twelfth is in sailor, and also in crew;

My whole is the name of a publication Known and admired throughout the nation.

LOADAMIA.

IV. CONUNDRUM.

Why is an author the most curious animal in creation?

R. F. H.

V. CHARADE.

My first is part of a harness, my second is a quadruped, and my whole is a species of my first.

LOADAMIA.

VI. ANAGRAMS.—LADY WRITERS.

1. Bonds? Disarm me!
2. Is Ann at home?
3. We made bad rails.
4. O! lame men.
5. I rest awhile, R.
6. All done (now).

J. D. A.

VII. NUMERICAL ENIGMA.

Whole I am a word of 10 letters, meaning a compounder of what few of us like.

- My 2, 3, 4 is a kitchen utensil;
My 5, 1, 4 is a covering for the head;
My 1, 2, 6 is an animal supposed to be related to us;
My 9, 8, 4 is an animal;
My 2, 6, 4 is a favourite;
My 9, 10, 6 is a kind of grain;
My 7, 1, 4 is a domestic animal;
My 5, 1, 4, 6 is the reverse of love;
My 9, 1, 4, 6 is to scold;
My 4, 8, 6 is a favourite beverage;
My 7, 8, 9 is a vehicle;
My 7, 8, 9, 4 is another vehicle;
My 7, 8, 9, 2 is a kind of fish;
My 4, 5, 6 is an article;
And my 2, 6, 1 is a well-known kind of pulse.

LOADAMIA.

VIII. LOGOGRIPH.

Whole, I am to entwine together.

Behead me, and I am a hostile incursion.

Again behead me, and I am still able to render assistance.

J. D. A.

XI. CHARADE.

My first is a useful noun, my second is a disagreeable noun, and my whole is a very disagreeable noun.

LOADAMIA.

X. CONUNDRUM.

When does the wind blow the sweetest?

J. D. A.

XI. REBUS.

My first is in mug, but not in spoon;
My second is in even, but not in moon!
My third is in girl, but not in boy;
My fourth is in mirth, but not in joy;
My fifth is in merry, but not in sad;
My sixth is in crazy, but not in mad;
My seventh is in marsh, but not in fen;
My eighth is in paper, but not in pen;
My ninth is in stick, but not in stake;
My tenth is in pies, but not in cake;
My eleventh is in heart, but not in liver;
My twelfth is in stream, but not in river;
My thirteenth is in rat, but not in mouse;
My fourteenth is in mansion, and also in house;
My whole is a well-known Christmas greeting.
Which one friend says to another on meeting.

LOADAMIA.

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